

THE

LONDON READER

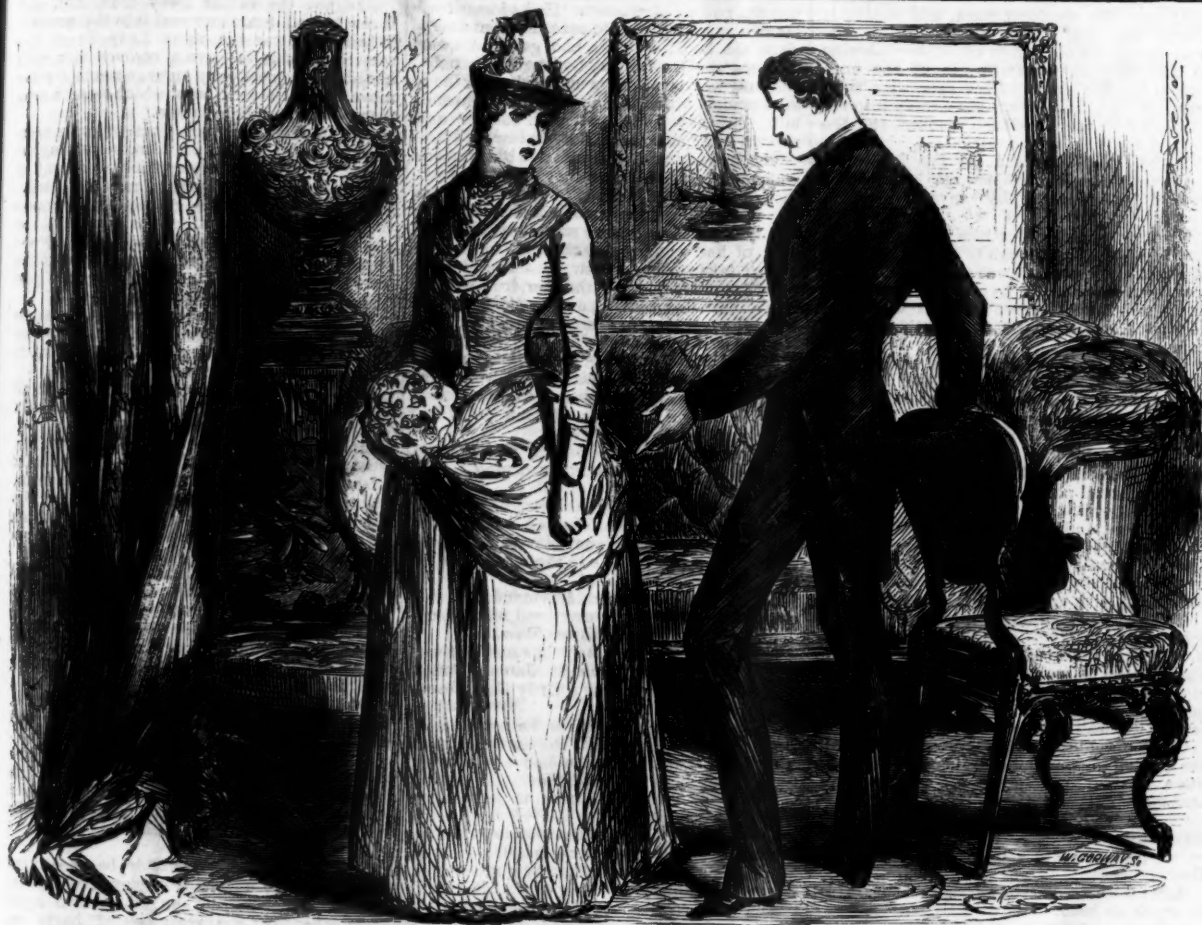
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["ARE YOU GOING TO TELL ME YOU HAVE THROWN ME OVER?" SIR ORIEL SAID.]

MORE THAN A BROTHER.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Soon after that uncomfortable scene in the library, the party at Wray broke up. Lady Gerda, wild with anxiety about her brother, reached her father's house in Grosvenor-street, only to find that Lord Fitzmaur had rushed in looking very ill, kissed his mother, given some orders to his servant, caught up his letters, and gone off again in the hansom which was waiting at the door.

Sir Oriel was invited to stay at Lord Bel-field's, but he preferred to remain in his own house, and drop in at the other whenever he felt inclined. He was dragged about from shop to shop, in the intervals between various dissipations; and though he told himself that he hated it, no one would have thought so who saw his cheerful aspect as he followed in Lady Gerda's train. He wanted Raymond Lovell to come and occupy one of the many empty rooms in the large London house, but the

barrister declared that he was too busy to leave his chambers in the Temple.

Sir Oriel once told Lady Gerda that he could not accompany her to Howell and James's, because he had to go elsewhere.

She pouted and refused to let him off, till he explained that he was afraid Lovell would work himself to death, and be buried alive under a heap of law-papers unless he went to rouse him out. Then her face changed, and she let him go without a word.

Raymond was sitting at a table, in the front room of number five King's Bench-walk, with a heap of papers strewn before him, but his elbows were on the well-worn mahogany, his head on his hands, and his thoughts far away, when he heard Rajah's hoofs waking the echoes on the stones outside.

He roused himself with a jerk, and went to the door to meet the young Baronet, who came up the stairs whistling the cheerful refrain of a popular song.

They grasped each other's hands, and each gave an eager look into the other's face.

"Awfully good of you to come and look me up!"

"You lazy brute, why couldn't you come when I asked you?" said Sir Oriel, laying his hand affectionately on Raymond's shoulder. "You look as thin as a match, and your profile is as sharp as a razor. You had better take care, or you'll lose your beauty and all chance of the imaginary duchess, who is going to fall in love with you some day."

"She had better be quick about it," said Raymond, with a short laugh, "for I'm growing old, at the rate of ten years a month."

"No use grinding too hard. If you won't come to Lowndes-square, why not run down to Wray, and keep my mother and Cora alive? I fancy Beatrice Ashley is there, and a man will be a godsend."

"I should only bore them; besides, I'm too busy."

"Nonsense; you are fagged to death. You can run up every morning, and only run down just in time for dinner, and I'm sure the country air will do you all the good in the world!"

After some objections, which Sir Oriel imperiously overruled, Raymond accepted the invitation with gratitude.



London was very hot, and the Strand literally stifling. Even when he could find time for a stroll to the West-end, he was always afraid of meeting Lady Gerda, and he knew that the sight of her fair, proud face would do him more harm than any amount of hard work. Down at Wray he would be quite safe from any chance of meeting her, for the London beauty must be tied to the metropolis by a hundred engagements.

It would be delightful to ramble by moonlight over the shadowy park, and penetrate where the night was darkest under the branches of the old forest trees; so charming to exchange the constant din of the busy streets for the sound of the deer with their troops of light cavalry sounding away into the shadows over the dew-laden bracken, and the song of the birds in the thicket!

Yes, he would go and get rest for weary heart and tired brain in the old house where he had spent the happiest days of his boyhood.

Cora would not bother him with questions, for she would have enough to occupy her mind in this marriage which was to bring such sorrow to them both. If he could only comfort her in some small degree his visit would not be wasted, and he would be glad that he had gone.

Sir Oriel spoke of the works which were proceeding rapidly on his estate, and in which he still continued to take the deepest interest, in spite of his love-making and other distractions.

"I feel in no end of a hurry to get it done," he said, as he sat on the edge of the table, and tapped his well-polished boot with the end of his riding-crop. "Raney, if anything happened to me, and the whole thing were stopped for years!"

"Why should anything happen to you?"

"I might be smashed in a railway accident," stooping to pick up one of his gloves.

"You might; and if you were who would come after you?"

"Cora, if I die without children. And if she marries a man like Fitzmaurice, with no more cash than principle, what chance would my poor people have? None, they would be sent to the wall without a doubt!"

"There would be a hindy," said Raymond, thoughtfully, "but Cora would fight for them like a dragon. That girl has any amount of courage."

"I tell you what, Ray; if you two could make up your minds to each other I should be as pleased as Punch!" exclaimed the Baronet, eagerly.

A hot flush rose to the barrister's cheeks, as he shook his head.

"No chance of that. I like her immensely, but we can't walk into love, at this time of day. That's quite out of the question." And he abruptly turned the subject.

Sir Oriel soon after departed, telling Raymond that he should count upon having his services as best man, a proposition that filled Lovell's soul with dismay.

But when he attempted an excuse Sir Oriel looked so hurt and indignant that he had to stop in a hurry and change it into an assent.

Raymond went down to the door with him, watched him as he climbed so easily and gracefully into the saddle, and saw him ride off under one of the grey arches, the horse bounding and curvetting with the exuberance of life, its rider looking the personification of youth and happiness, as he turned his head and waved his hand with a smile on his bright, good-looking face.

The chambers seemed intolerably dull and fusty when Lovell went back to them, which was always the consequence of one of the Baronet's flying visits.

The law-books were more uninteresting than ever, and he could not force his mind to take in the intricacies of a complicated case. "Was he to be cut off from all the enjoyments of life because he had fallen down and worshipped at the feet of a false idol? Was he to work with closed doors whilst youth was passing

away, and the glad sun was shining on millions of others? No, there was nothing very pressing on hand, no brief that he had to study to-day because he would have to use it in the Law Courts to-morrow.

He would no longer be a hermit shut out from the world, with nothing but his own miserable thoughts to keep him company.

Lady Gerda had fallen from the high pedestal on which he had placed her. He could no longer delude himself with the idea that she was the noblest of women. He had sacrificed his mother's diamonds to save her from a marriage she hated, and she had gambled away the proceeds in a few days without a thought. Not only had she thrown away the two thousand pounds which were to defray her personal bills, but she had gone even further and thrown away more than she possessed.

This he had gathered from some hasty words which she had let fall as they paced the terrace in the seductive moonlight, and his heart had melted like wax under the charm of her beauty. But now that he was away from the spell of her wondrous fascination, now that he had taken counsel with himself and with his conscience, he knew that no true woman would have led him on as she did at Wray, when the last hope of freedom had gone, and she was bent upon marrying his friend.

She ought to have avoided all chance of touching his hand or hearing his voice, instead of wilfully preparing *à la a-telle*, and drawing him on till their lips met in a forbidden embrace.

That his seemed to him in judgment against her, for was it not a wrong to his friend?

He would have liked to think of her again, as true as the stars, but she had not tried to be true to herself, and she had done her best to make him false—false to the man whom he had loved like a brother!

Later that afternoon Raymond, having changed his coat and smartened himself up, made his way towards Botten Row.

The Marchioness of Belfield's carriage was standing at the door, in St. James's street, and just as he was passing, Lady Gerda came out of the shop.

He was doubting whether he would step forward and hand her into the carriage, when Lord Moortown, whom he had not noticed, hurried up, shook hands with her, and, closing the carriage door, bent over to say a few words.

Then he saw Lady Gerda fumble in a side-pocket of the carriage, and hand a note to him, which had been evidently put there on purpose for him.

The Marchioness slipped it under his coat without looking at it, said something in a low voice, and retired, leaving Lady Gerda with a perfect sunset on her cheeks, which deepened considerably when she found that the meeting had passed under the eyes of Raymond Lovell, who had been stopped only a yard or two from the carriage by a casual acquaintance.

The horses started forward in their collars, Lady Gerda bowed gracefully, and the coroneted carriage proceeded on its way, followed by thoughts which were the reverse of flattering.

Vague rumours, of which he had not taken much heed, scraps of club gossip forgotten at the time, little looks and signs which had passed almost unheeded at the moment, began to gain new significance.

Good heavens! This woman, whom he had worshipped, was false all round! Untrue to himself, untrue to Sir Oriel, untrue to his own self!

Cost what it might, he would tear her out of his heart!

CHAPTER XXXII.

The wedding-day was drawing very near, and Cora Paget felt as if she were living in a dream.

Raymond Lovell watched her anxiously,

knowing the bitterness in her heart, and the shadow that was waiting to creep over her life.

Sometimes Sir Oriel would run down to see after his waterworks, which was an excuse for many a pleasant ride under the shade of the fine old trees.

Riding by his side, listening to his voice, laughing with or at him, according to her mood, Cora felt as if the old life had come back in all its sweetness.

She put the future away from her, and threw herself heart and soul into the present. When Oriel was not there Lady Paget was sometimes able to have a serious talk with her about the necessary arrangements for the move to the Dover House, which was to take place during the honeymoon.

But if Oriel appeared, Cora was soon rambling over the park with him, inspecting the works, examining fences which were out of repair, cottages that required new roofs, helping him to satisfy the gumbler, encourage the downcast, and comfort the sorrowful; or else she was in the stables talking over the puppies, patting the thoroughbreds, and giving her advice freely, as if she had taken the post of head-groom.

Raymond, who somehow found it possible to make a holiday now and then, was often with them, and Beatrice Ashley, trying to forget the man she loved.

But the two cousins seemed to be all in all to each other, and often forgot the presence of their friends.

Oriel, deceived by Cora's cheerful manner, treated her with just the same amount of affection as he used to before his engagement, seeing no danger for himself or for her; whilst Mrs. Stapley, Mr. Mason, and Mary shook their heads, and wondered what would happen next.

Lady Paget, on the other hand, was delighted to see the colour return to Cora's cheeks, the light to her eyes, although she feared and feared at her inclination to vague matters which she considered of prime importance.

Her faint remembrance fell on the wedding eve, for Cora, with fatal facility, gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour, and flattered, like the most reckless of moths, closer and closer to the candle.

Lord Fitzmaurice had never been heard of since the day she sent him away, as she felt herself free to do as she liked; and she had set herself the task of effacing from Sir Oriel's mind one or two scenes which no man was likely to forget.

She had a feverish desire to be once more just as they were when they played cricket together in the broiling sun, or tried to upset each other in the rickettiest of boats on the lake, but no one knew what an effort it cost her to seem outwardly cool when inward agitation was making heart and brain throb together with wild, unmeasured beats, or to make her low, soft laugh sound natural and cheerful when she felt as if she could cry out in her maddening pain!

"I wonder if Oriel has seen this?" said Raymond, coming in one day with a society paper in his hand.

He handed it to Cora, and she read with astonishment the following paragraph:—

"It is rumoured that Lady Gerda Stanton's engagement to Sir Oriel Paget, Bart., of Wray Hall, Bucks, has been broken off in favour of a certain popular Earl, who may be more fortunate in the Matrimonial Handicap than he was in the Two Thousand."

"Is there any truth in it?" she asked, quickly, her foolish heart giving a bound.

Before he could answer Sir Oriel came into the room with such an expression on his face that Cora knew at a glance that he had seen the paper.

He did not allude to it, but asked them if they would not come for a ride.

Beatrice said she would prefer to stay at home and write letters.

She thought of the night when Lord Moortown waited for a *tête à tête* in the library.

and Lady Gerda came sailing in, with an envelope in her hand.

She had never seen him since that night, but she was bearing her burden bravely, and trying to interest herself in other people.

Lady Paget found her of the greatest assistance to her, now that Cora was apt to be so much engrossed.

Beatrice went over to the Dower House with her—a long drive of ten miles through picturesque country—and gave her advice about new papers, &c., which could not be decided on during Cora's absence.

That wilful girl always said there was plenty of time, no reason to begin anything till the bride and bridegroom started on their honeymoon.

She would engage to be out of the house before their return, and that was all that was necessary.

Not for worlds would she have confessed the hope that lay dormant in her heart that something would occur to prevent the marriage.

It was stronger than ever now, as she rode by her cousin's side, and cast furtive glances at his troubled face.

He did not say a word about it, and he tried to talk just the same as usual, but there was a weight in the mental as well as the physical atmosphere that afternoon, and the ride was not as cheerful as usual.

Cora felt in a curious, expectant state as she hurried up to her bedroom to dress for dinner, which was to be earlier than usual on Lovell's account, who had been induced to stay till the last moment before going up to town for a conversation at the Temple.

Something would happen that night, she was sure; but she could not tell if it would be for good or evil.

Mary dressed her mistress with the utmost care, and thought that she had never seen her look so handsome.

Her dark eyes shone with the lustre of excitement, and the loveliest bloom was on her cheeks; but Mary noticed that her small hand shook as she caught up a scent-bottle, and emptied half the contents on her pocket-handkerchief.

"Poor, dear young lady," she said, to herself, as she watched the slight figure disappear down the stairs. "I should dance for joy if I could only hear that that stuck-up Lady Gerda had eloped with one of the gay gentlemen in London. To my dying day I shall always say Miss Cora was the one for the master."

All through the dinner Cora sat there with highly strung nerves, waiting, but what for she was waiting she could not have told.

The slightest movement, such as a hurried step in the passage or the slamming of a door, made her nearly start from her chair. And she wondered how Beatrice could talk so quietly and keep the conversation going so nicely, when she must have guessed that Lord Moortown was the subject of that paragraph.

Sir Oriel excused himself for his unusual gravity on the ground that he had a detestable toothache, and Cora promised to get him a remedy after dinner.

Raymond got up from the table, but would not let any of the others disturb themselves.

Sir Oriel called out,—

"Perhaps I shall look you up to-morrow. I'm coming up by the ten o'clock train."

Lovell nodded, and said he would be delighted to see him.

Lady Paget said, anxiously,—

"You will come down again in the evening?"

"No, mother. I don't suppose I shall be down again," looking very grave, "unless—" he stopped abruptly, but Cora in her own mind filled in the blank with these words,—"unless the marriage is broken off," and a flash of light shot from her eyes.

Beatrice followed Lady Paget into the drawing-room, but Sir Oriel asked Cora to come into the breakfast-room "to talk over things," as he vaguely expressed it.

The dark grey clouds were coming down in torrents of rain so that it was impossible to go into the garden, but cigarettes were considered permissible in every room except the drawing- and reception-rooms.

The young Baronet smoked one as he paced up and down, with an unusual frown puckering up his forehead.

Cora pretended to busy herself with some knitting whilst waiting for his mood to change, but she continually let a stitch drop in her preoccupation, and the stocking, if ever finished, would not be of much use to its owner.

Suddenly Sir Oriel broke the silence.

"You will keep an eye on Wilson, and see that he doesn't let the men lose time over their work, and if he thinks it better to double the number of workmen I don't object. But he must be careful as to the characters of the new hands, for I don't want the place to be demoralised by a lot of scamps."

"I'll tell him what you say."

"I know I can trust you to be down there almost every day."

"You forget that I shan't be here."

He stopped short, brought to a standstill by the thought that never again would they two be together in the old home as they had been in the free and pleasant life of the years that were past.

And he had given it all up for a woman who could not be true to him for the space of six weeks!

He threw away his cigarette, and sat down on the sofa by Cora's side.

The room was growing dusk with the grey twilight of the stormy evening, but she tried to continue her knitting though she could scarcely see to pick up the stitches.

"What will the place be without you, Cor?" he said, suddenly.

She caught her breath, and her work dropped down into her lap, but she answered nothing.

"If I had been engaged to you should I have seen your name linked with another man's in a scandalous paper before the engagement was over?" he asked, but again received no answer.

He came a little closer, and his voice was so low that she could scarcely hear it.

"Be good to me, Cor; I'm the most miserable dog alive!"

"My poor, dear boy," she sighed, her heart nearly bursting with tenderest compassion; and then he drew her nearer to him, till his aching head rested on hers, in the sweetness of her sympathy forgetting all else.

With no one else could he have sat there in silence, knowing that he was understood. He felt instinctively that Lady Gerda would be a fair-weather friend, willing enough to have him with her so long as he had a new joke to make her laugh or a story to interest her, but in sadness or sickness there would be no one like his "sister" Cora.

He stooped a little lower and their lips met, and an irrepressible longing came over him to be free—free as he was a few weeks ago, to choose the one he loved best.

Oh! fool, blind fool that he had been to stretch after another flower when the sweetest of all was close by his side!

"Cora! Cora!" he said, very low, with a sort of passionate entreaty in his tone which made her shake like a leaf in the wind.

He was unhappy, and she could not comfort him. He was in want of help, and she could do nothing for him!

Was there ever a harder position than hers? Oh! how willingly she would lay down her life for him to spare him a single sorrow!

"When I die"—he began, but at that moment the door was flung open by a footman, and Cora never knew what he was going to say, for in the flood of light which came in from the well-lit hall stood Lady Gerda Staunton!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR ORIEL started to his feet with an exclamation of surprise. Cora shrank back into the shadows.

Lady Gerda, clad in white from head to foot, with a crushed bouquet in her hand, came forward, with a little laugh.

"You funny people, to be all in the dark!" was her first exclamation, her sharp eyes discovering in a moment that Cora was Sir Oriel's only companion. "Aren't you surprised to see me? I thought I would come and tell you all about it myself."

"All about what, Gerda?" asked Sir Oriel, very gravely, as he shook hands.

Lady Paget and Beatrice Ashley came in from the drawing-room, the former exclaiming,—

"How good of you to take us by surprise in this charming manner!"

Lady Gerda looked from one to the other as soon as the first greetings were over, and seeing a certain gravity on all faces except that of her future mother-in-law, drew herself up as she answered the Baronet's question.

"It only happened to-day, and I knew a garbled account was sure to get into the papers, so I thought I had better run down and let you know the truth at once."

As the footmen were engaged in lighting the room Lady Paget proposed a move into the drawing-room, but as Lady Gerda was about to follow her, Sir Oriel laid his hand on her arm, and said, in a low voice,—

"Are you going to tell me that you have thrown me over?"

She started, and her face grew deathly pale.

"Good heavens, no! Are you mad, or do you think I am?"

"Then that confounded paper lied?"

There was no joy, no tone of intense relief in his voice, and it stung her to the quick.

If she wanted confirmation of the fact that he did not love her she had it then, and how willingly she would have cast him off if it had not been for those cruel debts.

"It certainly lied, if it said I was going to marry anyone but you," she said, quietly, and then passed on into the drawing-room.

"What can have happened to Oriel? I verily believe the boy has not kissed her yet," thought Lady Paget, uneasily, as Lady Gerda sat down on a sofa with a suggestive space by her side; and the Baronet, instead of availing himself of it, took his stand on the hearth-rug.

"And now, will you be so kind as to satisfy our curiosity?" he asked, with a courteous bow.

Cora, watching him feverishly from under her long lashes, thought she would have died at that tone and manner if she had been in Lady Gerda's position.

"Certainly," and instead of "dying," she put on her own most confident manner. "We were lunching at Richmond—a large and particularly festive party—and I really don't know why, but little Mrs. Cosmo Slaney actually threw a slur on my courage."

"My dear, I should never care what that odious woman said. I should not disturb myself in the least," said Lady Paget, loftily.

"Auntie, Mrs. Slaney is a great friend of Lady Gerda's," said Cora, warningly—but of no malice preposse, but only intending to prevent a discourtesy to a guest.

"Mrs. Slaney! The woman who goes in for bacarat!" exclaimed Sir Oriel in a tone of amazed disgust. "Gerda, is this true?"

"As true as the other lies which people are so fond of spreading about me," she answered, haughtily; but her fair face flushed like a red rose, and she cast a glance the reverse of loving in Cora's direction. "If you will interrupt me I shall never get to the point. As I tell you, she dared to insinuate that I was a coward; and when I vowed that I wasn't, she said she would believe it if I dared to sit behind Lord Moortown's black mares. Of course, after that, there was nothing to be done but to do it."

"You let Moortown drive you back to town?" slowly, as if he could scarcely believe his ears, whilst there was a dead silence all around.

"I did," defiantly; "but I assure you I held my breath and clung on to the side, and thought my last moment had come."

"A pity it didn't," he muttered, under his moustaches. Aloud he remarked, very quietly, "But, as a matter of fact, you saved everything but your reputation?"

Again her face flamed, but she laughed off her confusion.

"I attained my object, for I saved my reputation for courage. But we had a quite too terrible smash. The mares bolted, of course, and made straight for a waggon which was coming round a corner, on the wrong side of the road. Provisionally I was shot off into an elder bush in some kind Samaritan's garden, and got off with a torn dress, and a good shake to my nerves, as well as to my body. Look at my poor gown, how dreadfully it is spoilt!" holding up some fragments of white lace, which had formed a side panel down the skirt.

"And Moortown—did you leave him at the station?" inquired Sir Oriel, coolly.

"Ah! poor fellow! I'm afraid he's done for!" relapsing into sudden gravity. "I don't know if it's the head or the spine. He couldn't move or speak; but they sent for a cab and put me in. I could do no good by staying."

Cora stretched out her hand to Beatrice Ashley, who looked as if she would drop from her chair.

Beatrice squeezed her fingers as if she would break them; but neither spoke, only listened breathlessly.

"And you left him to die alone?" broke out Sir Oriel, aghast at her selfishness.

"Of course you would have been the first to complain if I had stayed with him."

There was an uncomfortable silence, during which Beatrice slipped from the room, accompanied by Cora.

"I must go to him," said Beatrice, standing still in the hall. "If he dies without a soul to speak to him of better things, what will become of him?"

"You want to go, but how can you? Oh darling, if I could only help you!"

"Let me think!" putting her hand before her heavy eyes. "At home I have a dress which I used to put on when I went into one of the worst alleys. That would save me from misconception, for I should look like a Sister of Mercy, and perhaps Aunt Effie would come with me."

"Miss Mackenzie!" exclaimed Cora, in astonishment.

"Yes. Oh! you don't know how good and kind she is when anyone is in trouble! She has been against him all along; but now—now—the soft voice trembled, the blue eyes overflowed—"I've no time to cry," dashing her tears away, as she moved towards the staircase. "There is a train at 10.15; but how can I get to the station?"

"You can have the fly in which Lady Gerda came, for she is sure to stay. If Raymond were only here!"

"I don't want anyone; I've got my maid. But find out the address for me, whilst I put on my hat."

"Merton is sure to know. I'll ask her," and Cora hurried away to make the necessary inquiries.

On her way she passed the suite of rooms which Lady Gerda had occupied when at Wray, and saw that they were being prepared for her once more.

Her wrath was at fever-heat, and only her sympathy with Beatrice, and her horror at Lord Moortown's accident, kept it from overflowing.

"She-devil!" she said, with a stamp of her foot, and passed on; but anyone who caught sight of her face at that moment would have been certain that evil was to come, sooner or later, to that happy home.

Beatrice's preparations for departure were

soon made, and she was already seated in the fly, when Sir Oriel came out in a hurry to ask what she was going to do.

As time was running short Beatrice pointed to Cora and said,—

"She will explain!"

Then the fly drove off through the pouring rain, and the Baronet turned to Cora.

"Is she mad enough to go after Moortown?"

"She is no madder than other people!" coldly.

"I think it is madness to go after a man who has just entangled himself with someone else!"

"That seems to be the fashion just now!" and then the pity and the wickedness of it all came across her, and she laid her head on his coat-sleeve. "What are you going to do?"

"To do? What do you mean?" he asked, though he knew very well. "There is nothing to be done!" and he turned away.

"Oh, yes, there is. Tell her that you have a prejudice in favour of truth and honour. Send her back to the man she has flirted with. She doesn't care for you! Can't you see it, or are you blind?" breathlessly.

"I'm not blind—let me go! Do you want to drive me out of my senses?" roughly, because of the torment of doubt in his heart.

"No, I want to bring you back to them!"

Cora panted, unable to stop herself now that she had lost her self-control. "Remember, if you bring a gambler and an adventurer to your home, you will break your own heart, ruin the proud old name, and bring Lady Page's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave!"

"Shut up! If you insult my wife you insult me, and I won't stand it!" his eyes flashing.

"She is not your wife yet," her bosom heaving with a tempest of rage, "and, pray Heaven, she never shall be!"

"Neither you nor anyone else shall prevent it!"

"Make her tell you the truth about Mrs. Slaney! Make her confess why, and how, and when she put herself in the power of a man like Lord Moortown! Make her confess what secret binds them together!"

"No more of this!" he thundered, for every thrust went home, and he was torn to pieces between his sense of loyalty to a woman, and his longing to break his engagement. "If I am satisfied no one else need trouble their heads about it."

"But you are not satisfied!" darting forward and placing herself between him and the door of the drawing-room. "I defy you to say you are. Oh, Oriel!" clasping her hands, and looking up into his face with her glorious eyes, full of the most passionate entreaty, "stop while there is time!"

A change came over his face. His arms involuntarily moved as if to clasp her to his breast. Never before had he seen her love for him shining so clearly out of the depths of her eyes—never before; and now he must turn his back on it.

"Confound you!" he said, fiercely, goaded out of all regard to politeness, as he clung to the thought of his honour. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

Then he put her aside quickly, and opening the door, went in, and slammed it in her face. Mason and one of the footmen, to their intense surprise, found her standing there still, as if rooted to the spot, her face as white as her dress, when they came from behind the curtains where they had been waiting for the scene to end.

(To be continued.)

FRIENDS and enemies are many-sided; and, while we may correctly see parts of their characters, other parts are veiled from us. Every one has his virtues and vices, his excellences and his shortcomings; and, while much we see in him may be actually there, there is much more of which we never dream.

THE MYSTERIES OF FERNLEA.

—10—

CHAPTER XI.

MR GRAY fairly gasped as his unexpected visitor demanded "Do you take me for a ghost!" It was so exactly what he had done, and the mistake seemed so ridiculous, so derogatory to his legal acumen, that he could not bring himself to confess to it. He just stood and stared at Mr. Yorke in speechless surprise.

"Look here," said Ronald, quietly, for he was a man who could speak calmly, however much his feelings were stirred. He could hide anxiety better than most people, for, as his mother said, he was not one to wear his heart on his sleeve. "Look here," he repeated, in the same matter-of-fact tone, "I have been in Paris ever since I left Fernlea. I have friends who can account for every hour of my time, and tell you that I have never altered anything. If a story of my illness has been imposed on you it has been done by some enemy for no good purpose."

Mr. Gray recovered himself. This was Ronald, and the telegrams were false. Having once decided this question he came to the conclusion he had better make a clean breast of all that had happened since Mr. Yorke left Fernlea.

"I declare you gave me quite a turn," he began, in an injured tone. "When you walked into the office you might have knocked me down with a feather."

"I'm afraid I can hardly apologise to you for being alive," returned Ronald, rather curtly. "Perhaps you will kindly give me your reasons for believing me dead?"

"I must say I felt hurt your mother never asked me to your funeral," observed Mr. Gray, reflectively. "Knowing you both so well, it seemed unkind."

In spite of the anxiety gnawing at his heart, Mr. Yorke could not forbear a smile. The position was too comical. He wondered if ever any man before had been called on to apologise to his lawyer for the latter not having been bidden to his funeral.

"My mother is in Italy, and I don't suppose she has the faintest idea of the hoax that has been played on you. Please tell me the whole affair? I want to know when I died, and of what disorder."

Mr. Gray plunged into the narrative. It was brief enough, since his conviction of Ronald's death rested solely on the two telegrams.

"And Natalie?" asked the lover. "Did she believe it?"

"Of course she did," cried Mr. Gray, indignant at its being thought possible he had been more credulous than the rest of the world. "Everyone believed it. Sparks said it was the saddest story he ever heard."

"Then you were a pack of simpletons!" said Ronald, driven to speak plainly by his indignation. "Why, Mr. Gray, you, who have been my mother's adviser for years, must have known she is just the woman to be stricken powerless by such a blow. Had there been any truth in those telegrams, my mother would have sent for you the same day."

"I thought it strange," admitted Mr. Gray. "Had you taken the simple precaution of asking at the station you would have heard I never went to London at all. I took a ticket for Dover, and branched off at the junction for the South."

Mr. Gray felt nonplussed.

"It's very easy for you to find fault now," he said, ruefully; "but you'd have been taken in just the same. Who ever heard of people sending false telegrams?"

"It's a very old dodge."

"And, besides," persisted the lawyer, "the telegram begged for Natalie to go to you. Now it was barely twenty-four hours after

your engagement. How could any stranger know of it?"

"I don't suppose any stranger *did* know," said Ronald, scornfully. "Both those telegrams were sent by Lady Julia Daventry."

"Nonsense! They were handed in at the Charing-cross office, and I am ready to swear Lady Julia never left Fernlea on that day."

"She has wealth enough to bribe a dozen accomplices; but let us leave the question of the telegrams. Tell me, how is Nita?"

"She has been very ill."

Ronald looked troubled.

"I daresay she grieved for me, poor child. You don't mean she has been ill apart from sorrow?"

"I do—very ill."

"What's been the matter? Have they had advice?"

"Dr. Arnold attended her."

Ronald's face cleared. He knew the physician by repute as the greatest medical authority in Blankshire. If he had been attending Nita, at least she had received the best of care.

"What did he say?"

Mr. Gray looked uncomfortable.

"He said she would never get better at Fernlea, that the facts of its being the scene of her acquaintance with you and of the strange disappearance of Janet Dent, by themselves were quite enough to prevent her recovering while she remained there."

"Do go on," said Ronald, irritably. "Can't you see you are torturing me by suspense?"

"I must tell my story my own way. Dr. Arnold, it seems, took a great fancy to Natalie, and he persuaded Lady Julia to let her pay a month's visit to his wife and daughters. She went there three days after you left Fernlea."

"Then she is in good hands. Mrs. Arnold is a charming woman, and her girls are just the companions I would have chosen for my darling. I shall go down to Monkton by the first train to-morrow."

"You will have your journey in vain."

"Pardon me, Lady Julia is not omnipotent. Her will may shut me out of Fernlea, but I don't believe it would induce such a woman as Mrs. Arnold to deny me a glimpse of Natalie after I have been given back to her, as it will seem, from the grave."

"You will not see her!"

"You mean Lady Julia exacted a promise her daughter should see no visitors?"

"I mean that Nita Daventry has left Dr. Arnold's."

Ronald opened his eyes.

"You said she went there for a month?"

"She did."

"Well, she can't have been there half that time."

"She was there just a week, and then —"

"She went back to Fernlea," suggested Mr. Yorke. "Why ever didn't you say so before?"

"Because she didn't."

"Then why did she go?"

"I don't know."

Ronald looked irate.

"Gray, for pity sake, speak plainly! If you have gone over to Lady Julia's side and have resolved to help her to part us, say so plainly."

"My good fellow, I take no side at all, and I am speaking as plainly as I can. I don't know where your *fiancée* is. I wish I did!"

"But —"

"It's an old story now," said Mr. Gray, "nearly five days old. They left her in the garden reading a book, and she—went away!"

Yorke looked terrified.

"But it is impossible!"

"It is the simple, unvarnished truth. Do you remember the disappearance of Janet Dent?"

"Perfectly. But what has that to do with Nita?"

"Everything. You know that she was devotedly attached to her old nurse?"

"Yes."

"She left a slip of paper behind her, saying that Janet Dent was very ill and wanted her."

Ronald Yorke shuddered.

"But I thought Miss Dent had never been heard of?"

"Nor has she; a munificent reward has been offered. Sparks has taken up the case with devoted energy, but not the slightest clue has been found to the missing woman. As yet, all efforts have failed to find her, living or dead."

"And Natalie is with her?"

"I don't think so."

Ronald Yorke drew himself up proudly.

"She said so, and she is incapable of deceit!"

Mr. Gray looked at him pityingly.

"I'm glad to see you, for your mother's sake and for your own. I always liked you, but I'm thinking, Mr. Yorke, when you hear all, you'll wish those telegrams had been true, and you were where troubles cannot come."

Ronald Yorke shook his head.

"I am no coward. I shall not wish for death even if life loses all its charms. Besides, I have my work to do. Do you think after what you have told me I can rest a moment idle? I will find my darling if it takes me all my years!"

Mr. Gray shook his head.

"You had better not."

"Why?" and Ronald's eyes flashed with indignation. "Why? Do you thing I esteem her less because she set aside form and ceremony to rush to her old nurse's help?"

"No; but do you remember Lady Julia's invincible objection to the match?"

"I do."

"Well, the reason for them has been divulged—not publicly, but to a few. Poor Natalie has in her constitution the germs of a terrible disease. Save for a miracle, she will end her days in a lunatic asylum."

"Rubbish!"

He had expected the young man to be utterly overcome. He had been quite prepared for a burst of agonised despair; therefore Ronald's cool reception of his news took him terribly aback, and his first feeling was vexation that he had not made more impression.

"Her grandmother died raving mad."

"She did nothing of the kind!"

"She had been in an asylum for years."

"Her grandmother was Joan Daventry, a woman whose memory is cherished by every villager on the estate. Natalie is her image, I have been told over and over again!"

"Most people have two grandmothers," observed the lawyer, grimly. "I did not allude to Mrs. Daventry, but to the Countess of —"

Ronald interrupted him.

"Lady Julia's mother!"

"Precisely."

"Then I have no fears. I will tell you frankly, Mr. Gray, I *detest* Lady Julia. If Natalie had resembled her in the slightest detail I could not have loved her. I have made the attempt again and again, but I never could find a solitary trait of resemblance between Natalie and her mother. I am quite willing to run any risk of evil coming to Natalie from Lady Julia by inheritance; they are too unlike."

"It seems her mother has feared it for years."

"I wonder she did not fear for herself. She surely would be in more danger than Natalie!"

"Such maladies often skip over a generation."

"Well, Mr. Gray, I know you meant kindly, but I am not in the least alarmed on that score. I would marry Natalie to-morrow if I could find her, but I hope it is only a question of a few days."

Mr. Gray shook his head mournfully.

"You are young and headstrong—you can't reason out a thing!"

"I am not particularly young, and no one ever called me headstrong before. What is it I can't reason out?"

Mr. Gray looked at him so "mn".

"Am I to tell you?"

"I thought I said so."

"You are so impetuous, you may put yourself into a passion."

"I think not. I daresay I shall differ from you, for I can see you have made up your mind my Natalie is mad, and I am assured of her sanity; but I promise to listen patiently."

"Don't you see that if Natalie Daventry is insane, it explains the mysteries of Fernlea at once?"

There was an ominous light in Ronald's eyes at the insinuation, but he remembered his promise and restrained the passionate denial which rose to his lips.

"I do not see it. Granted that Lady Julia's daughter is insane, and therefore, in paroxysms of madness induced with extraordinary strength, she would not have the power of keeping a tall, muscular woman like Janet Dent in hiding against her will; neither would she possess the gift of passing through locked doors and bolted windows. You yourself, if you remember, had a peculiar visitor at Fernlea? Perhaps you are prepared to assert that that was Nita?"

"Certainly not; it was far too tall—too massive entirely."

"Very well; then Natalie's madness fails to clear up the Fernlea mysteries. How does Lady Julia take the matter?"

"Very beautifully. She seems almost heart-broken by grief. Joan is kept quite busy waiting on her."

"And how go Miss Daventry's love affairs?"

"Sir Murray Macgregor is looked on as sure of success, but he has promised Lady Julia not to speak out until after the end of January."

"Ah! Do you know if my friend Anstruther is still staying at Fernlea?"

"He was sent for to his brother's the very day you left. Report has it Lord Anstruther is dangerously ill."

Ronald Yorke paced up and down the room with feverish strides.

"Gray, do speak out, or I shall go mad myself. Have they tried to find her? Is there no clue? What do people think? What is to be done?"

"Every possible attempt has been made, and not the slightest clue to her has been found. You see the day she went there was a kind of open-air bazaar and fancy fair, about three miles off, and everyone almost had gone there. Monkton must have been perfectly deserted at the hour when she left the doctor's house."

"What does he say?"

"Very little. Dr. Arnold refuses to take either side; he is a remarkably cautious man."

Ronald caught up the words.

"Either side! What do you mean?"

Mr. Gray hesitated.

"You are sure to hear it at Fernlea, so I may as well tell you; but I fear it will be painful to you. There are two theories afloat about poor Natalie Daventry's disappearance. The one is that she is hopelessly insane; that Janet Dent's disappearance was of her contriving; that she somehow accomplished the poor woman's death; and losing you so soon afterwards filled her with remorse, and made her think she must take her own life. The people who adopt this theory declare her parting note to Mrs. Arnold bears them out; that going to Nurse Janet meant going to join her in death. They say that your poor Nita went to whatever spot holds Janet's remains, and there immolated herself by her victim."

Ronald drew a long breath.

"And they can think that of her so pure and innocent, so sweet and childlike? I don't blame you, Mr. Gray. I asked you to tell me, and I can't be angry with you for obeying me; but, oh! I would like to seize the vile slanderers, and make them eat their words." Then, as though seized with a sudden thought, "now tell me who believes this rignarole?"

"The mother and sister."

"Of course," interrupted Ronald, scornfully.

"They would believe anything ill of her. Go on."

"Mr. Gibbs, their usual medical attendant, the Macgregors, and nearly all the neighbours."

"And the other theory?"

"That is not spoken of so openly. You know, Mr. Yorks, one might be imprisoned for slander or defamation of character if one said it publicly."

"What is it?"

"It is Sparks's theory, and the butler agrees with him. I believe in his heart Dr. Arnold does too, but it is never even whispered about. Sparks says all would be lost if any one knew just what it was."

"But you know, and you must tell me?"

Mr. Gray hesitated.

"Lady Julia is my client."

"So am I, so is poor Natalie, at least by descent! Mr. Gray, if you have any pity in your heart, speak out."

"The idea is that Lady Julia is keeping Natalie hidden for purposes of her own; that she had good reasons for getting rid of Janet Dent; and that though she affects the most entire ignorance, and manifests great anxiety about Natalie's fate, yet really she, and she only, is responsible for her leaving Dr. Arnold's."

Ronald seemed lost in thought.

"I believe there is something in it," he said at last; "but people seldom go so far without a motive, and I can't see any motive for a mother persecuting her own child."

"You asked me to speak, and I have spoken. I know nothing more!"

"And what do you believe yourself?"

Mr. Gray drew a long breath.

"You will laugh at me, I daresay; but I can't form an opinion. I assure you my week at Fernlea took more out of me, and did more to age me before my time, than a year of honest, hard work. I have thought about the whole thing till I grew nearly distracted, and at last I have had to give it up. I am not a detective by profession, like Mr. Sparks, nor yet one by natural gift as Lady Julia's butler. If I want to keep my faculties together I must not try to solve the mysteries of Fernlea."

"Then you take neither side?"

"I believe Lady Julia neglected Natalie, and I think she has thoroughly spoiled the step-daughter. I don't know when I disliked any woman so much as I do these two; but beyond this I won't go except to tell you it will be a happy day for me when the heiress comes of age, and I deliver up her papers into her own hands."

"You will have to go down to Fernlea again for that?"

"Never! I may be a superstitious man, Mr. Yorks, but I will never set foot in Fernlea again while the curse still hangs over it."

"But the curse can't be removed, can it?"

"Yes! If ever Duke Davenry's descendants rule at Fernlea peace and domestic happiness will return to it; and till then I prefer to keep my distance."

"They can't return to it?"

"They can. Duke left one son. I daresay he's a married man with a family by this time. If Miss Jean died, and poor Miss Natalie is not found, Duke's son would be the heir-at-law."

"I believe you are counting on it!" cried Yorks hotly. "You actually want those poor girls to die to benefit a man you have never seen?"

"I want nothing of the sort; but I think more than half a century long enough for any quarrel to last, and I am convinced until this family feud is healed there will be nothing but trouble for the Davenrys of Fernlea."

"Well; I shall go down to-morrow!"

"For what purpose?"

"To find Nita!"

Mr. Gray opened his eyes.

"My dear sir, do you believe you can trace her five days after her loss, if Sparks, who is a professed detective, and was set on her track within two hours of her being missed, failed to find the least clue to her?"

"Love conquers all things!"

Mr. Gray shook his head.

"It's the strangest story I ever heard. That poor child half broke her heart thinking you were dead, and lo! you come to life again, and find her lost. I never heard anything to equal it!"

"I shall find her!" said Ronald, with a quiet air of conviction. "You may have to wait some time, sir; but you shall dance at our wedding yet!"

"I doubt it!"

"For pity sake," pleaded Ronald, "say no more to discourage me. Heaven knows I have had disappointment enough. Three days ago I felt sure of conquering Lady Julia's hostility. Her own son promised me the means of enforcing her consent!"

"What, Jack Howard? You have seen him?"

"I was at his funeral yesterday. He died, leaving his sister in my care!"

"And the 'means'?"

"His wife had betrayed him. It seems there were family papers Lady Julia was anxious to possess. She had tried to bribe him again and again, but he always refused. With these papers in my possession, he said, she dared not refuse me Natalie. I held the pocket-book in my hand, but it was empty. His wife had bartered the contents unknown to him."

"And he is dead?"

"Yes! Mr. Gray, if you had heard the way he spoke of Lady Julia your faith in her must be shaken. It was terrible to listen to!"

"And yet she loved him?"

"Better than Nita, certainly. Mr. Gray, have you ever had any idea (besides the insanity theory, which I laugh to scorn) why Lady Julia hates her only child?"

"No! But I believe Sparks has."

"Where is he?"

"At the Davenry Arms!"

"Has he quarrelled with Lady Julia?"

"Not in the least. He is still nominally in her employ; but when she left Fernlea he preferred to stay at the inn. He is there in his own colours. All the village knows now that he is the great London detective, Isaac Sparks!"

"And where is Lady Julia?"

"At the Langham Hotel, with Miss Davenry and a maid. If you call you might like to see the servant. Her name is Pauline, and I believe her devoted care saved your Natalie's life when she was unconscious—after the news of your death."

(To be continued.)

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

—O—

CHAPTER X.

It was, indeed, Gervase Talbot, older, sterner, the first fresh beauty of his manhood gone, the look of one who had been through the valley of the shadow of death in some horrible form of suffering, the effects of which still haunted him, graven upon his pale, worn, still handsome face.

Horace Fielding regarded him with a blending of stupefied rage and astonishment. The recognition that had taken place between Madeline and this man was sufficient to establish his identity.

He had ventured to use Talbot's name in order to ensnare her, and, as if it had been an incantation, it had brought the artist upon them in this extraordinary manner. He had risen, as it were, from the dead to rescue the woman they both loved.

"What the deuce do you mean, sir, by bursting into another house through the wall, and presuming to interfere with my arrangements?" he demanded, furiously.

"An explanation of your conduct would be more to the purpose under the circumstances,"

said Gervase Talbot, contemptuously. "Mine is easily accounted for. Madeline," bending over the chair in which he had placed her, "who is this man, and what are you doing here?"

She pulled the crumpled note bearing Gervase Talbot's signature from her pocket, and placed it in his hands, hardly able to realise as yet that he was indeed restored to her.

"I received it two hours ago," she said, brokenly, "and I came at once. I would have gone to the world's end and had you sent for me, Gervase. You did not, you could not have lent your sanction to such a shameful deed?"

His unexpected appearance, as strange as it was opportune, confused and bewildered her, taken in conjunction with the note purporting to come from him which she had received. It seemed incredible that no connecting link should exist between them, yet so it was.

"I don't understand," said Gervase Talbot, after reading it; "this note was not written by me, although my signature has been attached to it. I only returned to England a month ago and—as yet I have not attempted to communicate with you, Madeline, for various reasons. Neither am I ill. It is a forgery!"

"Yes, the production of Mr. Horace Fielding, Lady Roscoe's brother!" said Madeline, recovering her composure a little, and striving to grasp the many features presented by the situation, wounded love forcing its way uppermost.

Since Gervase was alive and well why had he not communicated with her all this long while? "It seemed as if he had even tried to avoid her," she thought, sadly.

Gervase Talbot started as she uttered Lady Roscoe's name; then he looked sternly across at Horace Fielding.

"Mr. Fielding requested me not long ago to marry him," continued Madeline, "and I refused. He wrote that note for the purpose of bringing me here under a false impression. It was his intention to detain me here until I promised to become his wife, in order to save my good name."

The artist's relief kept pace with his anger. Madeline cared nothing for this fellow then, he told himself, thankfully. She had come expecting to see her former lover in answer to his supposed summons. Such forgiveness and forbearance on her part, touched, while it astonished him.

"And what price does Mr. Fielding expect to pay for the privilege of signing another man's name, of doing his best to compromise an innocent girl in order to compel her to marry him?" he asked, his face flushing ominously. "You cur! if you ever dare to show your face in society again after this I'll have you publicly disgraced."

Mad with a sense of shame and utter failure, Horace Fielding laughed insolently.

"Certainly it was beneath a gentleman's dignity to avail himself of your name," he sneered. "An obscure dauber, who found it convenient to efface himself abruptly, to disappear below the surface, leaving no trace behind."

"Gervase, take me home. Do not stay to quarrel with him!" whispered Madeline, imploringly.

"Will you allow me and this lady to pass you?" said Gervase, approaching the door, still guarded by Horace Fielding.

The answer was an oath. Fielding, who had been drinking to keep his courage up, was hardly master of himself.

The artist's eyes flashed. With a blow dealt straight from the shoulder he sent Horace Fielding flying to the other end of the room, just as the landlady, alarmed by the noise made in bursting open the locked door, entered it.

Fearful of the consequences to herself, of losing her reputation in the neighbourhood, she began to pour forth extenuating pleas, to transfer all blame from her shoulders to the

broader ones of Horace Fielding. Gervase Talbot interrupted her without ceremony. "Fetch a cab!" he said, briefly. "I am inclined to reward you as Mr. Fielding's accomplice in this matter. If you would escape punishment, you will remain silent with regard to all that has happened here to-night!"

The cab procured, Madeline went downstairs and got into it, accompanied by Gervase Talbot, no further attempt being made by Horace Fielding, who had picked himself up, to prevent their departure.

"You know my address?" said Madeline, in a tone of surprise, as she heard Gervase mention it to the cabman.

"Yes!" he replied, as they drove along through the wild, windy night. "I made inquiries about you, Madeline, immediately upon my return to England. I ascertained the good fortune that had fallen to your share, and Mr. Vernon's town address. I have walked by the house many times during the last month in the vain hope of obtaining a glimpse of you!"

"But why not call?" she asked. "Gervase, where have you been? What became of you on that night? You suffered me to think of you as dead. It was cruel, cruel! Have you no explanation to offer?"

He had not attempted to kiss her. His manner was reserved and sombre. He seemed to be keeping himself under by strong, painful effort. What could have happened to change him thus?

"Madeline, have you forgiven me yet?" he cried, suddenly. "I have been sorely punished for my folly, my brief madness. Do not judge me too harshly!"

"Forgive you!" she repeated, wonderingly. "What is there to forgive, save your inexplicable absence and long silence? Gervase, dear Gervase!" bursting into sudden tears of mingled grief and gladness, "what cloud has come between us?"

Her wonder began to be reflected in his eyes.

"You received my letter?" he said, interrogatively. "The one posted on the eve of my disappearance?"

"No. The last letter I received from you bore date a week previous," was the reply. "That was the last communication of any kind that reached me. Did you write again after that?"

"Yes."

"Then the letter must have been lost in transit. How very—"

"And you have gone on caring for me all this time?" he interrupted. "You have never ceased to love me, Madeline, to regard yourself as mine?"

"No, Gervase; yet if you—"

He folded her in his arms in a rapture of welcome blessed relief and thankfulness. He rained kisses upon brow and cheek and lips. Such vehement demonstrative love, following hard upon his estranged demeanour, startled while it soothed and reassured her, setting all her fears at rest.

"Oh, my love! my darling! my good angel!" he exclaimed, passionately. "I am unworthy of you, and yet to feel, to know, that you are still mine in your gentle worth and purity has filled me with fresh life, and driven away the shadows that haunted me!"

Then, to increase her perplexity, Gervase Talbot, who had just been so valiant in her defence, drooped his head upon her shoulder and sobbed like a child. She forgot her own agitation in soothing him, so strange and unwonted.

"Now that we are reunited, dear, nothing shall ever part us again," she said, bravely, passing her hand caressingly through the short crisp waves of red-gold hair she remembered so well. "Gervase, my Gervase! since you are restored to me I care for nothing else. You shall tell me just as much or as little as you please respecting the events of the past year. I can trust you, as of old!"

"You shall know all—in relation to my

disappearance, I mean," he replied, regaining his self-control. "I was not to blame for that. It is a long story, in no wise redounding to the credit of my cousin, Percy Dennison. If ever a fiend existed in human form it is he. I am only biding my time, remaining *perdu* for a while, in order to strengthen the reprisal when it comes. He sent me to a fate a thousand times more horrible than death. As if by a miracle I have escaped, and been able to aid you in an extremity as well, to effect your deliverance. Let Percy Dennison be on his guard when next we meet. I shall not spare him!"

"Was he entirely responsible for your disappearance?" cried Madeline.

"Yes. He wanted me to sell Inglefield to him, and when I refused he set himself to get rid of me. He must have known of the existence of this quarry even then, and longed to get possession of the estate to work it."

"Then I have not suspected him unjustly," she replied. "I felt that he was in some way connected with your fate. Through all those long, cruel, suspenseful months I have doubted him."

"My poor little girl, what you must have suffered on my account!" exclaimed Gervase Talbot, fiercely. "I shall be all added up when my reckoning comes off with Percy Dennison. I am looking forward to it. I would not forego it to save his worthless life. And now," as the cab stopped, "for your uncle. Is he very formidable, Madeline?"

"Only rather," was the reply. "Don't contradict him, whatever you do, and make a little allowance for probable temper, especially to-night."

Joshua Vernon, having returned from the City dinner to find that note on the drawing-room mantelpiece, and his niece still absent, was about, as she had predicted, to follow her when the cab drove up, and Gervase and Madeline alighted from it.

"Uncle Joseph, this is Mr. Talbot!" she said, introducing the two men, a kind of radiance, the result of intense happiness, resting upon her lovely face, and shining in her eyes.

"Indeed—humph, bless my soul! Glad to make your acquaintance, sir, and to learn that you are still in existence," replied Uncle Joshua, glancing keenly at the artist as he spoke. "Madeline, my dear, it was rather extraordinary of you to go off in that way by yourself to a strange address. You have made me very uneasy about you, and I thought, from what you said, that Mr. Talbot was at death's door. He could only have given a runaway knock."

"The note I received was not written by him at all," explained Madeline, throwing her arms around the old man's neck. "Oh, Uncle Joshua, I have had such a narrow escape, and it was Gervase who saved me!"

Then, in rather incoherent style, with occasional assistance from Gervase Talbot to help out her story, Madeline informed her astonished and indignant relative of the dishonourable *ruse* by means of which Horace Fielding had drawn her from home, his object in so doing, and Gervase Talbot's timely intervention.

To say that Joshua Vernon flew into a passion when Fielding's villainy was disclosed to him would be to put it mildly. He was simply beside himself with rage at the indignity offered to his niece, while his former high opinion of Horace Fielding, so obstinately adhered to, tended to increase his anger against that gentleman, since it had proved so erroneous. A more mistaken conception of a man's character had never been arrived at. Joshua Vernon, compelled to admit this, felt furious, since it reflected upon his own powers of discernment.

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed the angry old man. "He shall suffer for this, Madeline. That I should have formed such a good opinion of him. But he hoodwinked me, and the cleverest man living might have been

deceived by his plausible manner. The scoundrel! I'll make London too hot to hold him in less than twenty-four hours. Mr. Talbot," pausing to grasp the artist's hand, "I owe you a debt of gratitude for rescuing my little girl. I daresay she will undertake to pay it, though. That you should be so close at hand was nothing short of providential. I never ascribe these things to chance myself. You were thus enabled to deliver her from a most compromising position. And that fellow, is he still at the house? Did you leave him there?"

It took all Madeline's power of persuasion, aided by Gervase, to prevent Joshua Vernon from going in quest of Horace Fielding that very night, to inflict condign punishment upon him. He yielded reluctantly to their representations that it would be undesirable to give publicity to the affair, that other means of dealing with Horace Fielding, and compelling him to account for his conduct, would be found later on.

"And you, sir," said Uncle Joshua, turning sharply upon Gervase, compelled, in spite of gratitude owing, to give vent to his irritation in some shape or form. "Surely there is an explanation due with regard to your conduct in disappearing so mysteriously, and not allowing my niece, to whom you were or are still engaged, to know what had become of you?"

"Certainly; and I think when you have listened to that explanation, Mr. Vernon, you will exonerate me from all blame in the matter," replied Gervase Talbot, with a quiet dignity that set well upon him. "I owe my strange disappearance from society entirely to my cousin, Percy Dennison, whose anxiety to gain possession of Inglefield Park induced him—well, as he imagined, to suppress me effectually."

"The deuce it did!" exclaimed Uncle Joshua. "Well, at any rate, I never formed a high opinion of Mr. Dennison. That is one comfort. Do you mean to say he tried to kill you?"

"That would have been merciful compared with the devilish malice—the fate prepared for me!" said Gervase Talbot, the stern, unrelenting look dawning again in his eyes.

Madeline, listening intently, crept close to him, and slid her hand with a reassuring, loving clasp into his.

"My cousin met me that night by the river-side," he went on, "as I was smoking my cigar, and proposed an adjournment to his rooms. He had a matter of business to discuss with me, he said, and I went with him accordingly. Supper was laid for us, and during the meal he renewed his offer to purchase Inglefield Park of me, and for the second time I refused to entertain it."

"The wine I drank must have been drugged. I can just remember being helped downstairs by him and into a cab, then I became unconscious. When I came fairly to my senses again I was at sea, fastened down in my berth, unable to move. When I attempted to rise a kind of network, stretched over the berth, and brought even with my throat, well-nigh strangled me."

"As first I could not understand or realise my position. When I angrily questioned the captain, who, with his son, a deaf mute, were the only people I saw for many days, he refused to give me any direct answer. I threatened him; and the brute, Percy Dennison's confederate in villainy, laughed and bade me do my worst against him, *should I ever get the chance!*"

"My friends, he added, had sent me on a long sea-voyage for the benefit of my health, and my treatment on board would depend to a great extent on my behaviour."

"Then, for the first time, the horrible idea that my cousin was answerable for this crime, that he had deliberately planned it, in order to get rid of me that he might inherit Inglefield, crossed my mind. It drove me nearly frantic with rage and pain. I had sufficient sense, however, to behave quietly,

since resistance was worse than useless, whatever the fate in store for me might be.

"After some days had elapsed I was permitted to go on deck. I noticed the crew all gave me a wide berth. If I spoke to them they never replied. The captain had described me as a dangerous lunatic, intrusted to his care, and thus all my protests, my attempts to enlist sympathy and aid, went for nothing.

"Ours was, I found, a small trading vessel bound for the Hawaiian Islands. What they purposed doing with me when there I vainly strove to discover from that villain, the captain.

"The cargo was landed at length, another shipped in its place, still I was kept a close prisoner on board. One day, the last ere he set sail for England, I was ordered by the captain to come on deck. A boat ready manned was waiting, and I got into it. Was I actually to be set at liberty? Had the captain been frightened into releasing me? My heart beat high with hope. Yet the crew would not speak to me; they shrank from my very touch. Presently they landed me on an island at some distance from the rest, and rowed swiftly away.

"Some natives were hurrying down to the shore to greet the new-comer. I went towards them. Merciful Heaven! what forms! what sights of horror! Some bloated and swollen out of all semblance to humanity, some shrivelled up to mere sticks, the skin drawn tightly over the staring bones, others minus limbs and features—all alike horrible. I had been landed upon the Hawaiian leper island!"

An exclamation burst simultaneously from the lips of Madeline and Uncle Joshua.

"I ascertained afterwards," Gervase continued, "that the captain had informed the authorities I was suffering from English leprosy, as well as being wrong in my head, and they had consented to my removal to the island, where these unhappy creatures live in strict seclusion. Once in contact with them I should, of course, contract the complaint, and die a lingering death of the most horrible description. This was how Percy Dennison, too cowardly to commit a direct murder, purposed to get rid of me!"

"He is a fiend!" cried Madeline.

"I recognised them as lepers, fortunately," Gervase went on, "and made signs for them to keep at a distance from me. They did so. Presently a white man, a German pastor in charge of the mission to the lepers, came along.

"I described my position to him, to learn in return where I was, and the complaint I was stated to be suffering from. This put the finishing touch to my previous sufferings. In broken German I revealed to him the plot of which I had been a victim.

"The pastor was very kind. He took me to his own cottage, ascertained that I was free from any taint of leprosy, and made me his guest. A long and severe illness kept me a prisoner there for months. When I recovered I left that fearful island in the vessel that brought provisions for the lepers; the English consul paid my passage home to England. But for presence of mind and the pastor's interposition I should have been there still—a leper like the rest. One touch would have sealed my fate!"

"Good heavens, what an escape!" said Uncle Joshua, his eyes suspiciously moist. "And your cousin? There is no punishment adequate to such an offence; yet he must and shall suffer!"

"I am going down to Inglesfield next week," replied Gervase, with a peculiar smile, "to let him know that I have returned in safety."

CHAPTER XI.

ONCE again Inglesfield was *en fête*. Percy Dennison, the virtual master there, since Gervase Talbot had never returned to claim his own, was striving to ingratiate himself with the county people, and to become gene-

rally popular throughout the neighbourhood. In furtherance of his object he had promised to supply the stone with which to build a new church from the recently-discovered quarry in the Park, that was already yielding him a fortune.

The foundation-stone of the new building was to be laid to-day, and Inglesfield had plenty to occupy its attention. A countess was to perform the ceremony. A bishop was coming to pronounce the benediction after it.

Although late in the year the day proved fine and cloudless, and as the hour appointed for the public and much talked-of event drew nigh, the site of the church became crowded to the excess.

Of course, a space immediately around the stone had been roped off for the *élite*, and those invited by Percy Dennison, including the bishop and the countess. This enclosure was prettily decorated with red baize, flowers, and ferns. Outside it, his soft felt hat drawn low over his face, unnoticed, undetected, stood the rightful owner of Inglesfield, Gervase Talbot, waiting for the ceremony to begin.

The suffering and disillusion through which he had recently passed, the shameful wrong still unavenged, had not been without their effect upon the artist's character.

He was less gay and light-hearted than of old. He did not live so much upon the surface of things. He had gained in concentration of purpose; his judgment was less faulty, his will stronger. From that terrible experience he had returned a sadder and a wiser man, with his own keen love for Madeline Vernon once more in the ascendant.

During his absence the scales had dropped from his eyes. Gladys Fielding's spell had been broken. She had merely bewitched his senses, and cast a glamour over him; his heart remained true in its allegiance to Madeline. This was the knowledge he woke up to with a start, after that fatal letter had been penned and sent to Madeline.

The news of Gladys Fielding's marriage helped to increase his disillusion in that quarter, to prove her utter infidelity and worldliness; for had she cared for him as she professed to do, could she have wedded Lord Roscoe so soon after his disappearance? Fool that he had been and madman to reject gold for itself, the substance for the shadow!

On returning to England he had not ventured to seek Madeline out, to implore her forgiveness. The letter in which he had confessed his love for Gladys Fielding, and requested her to release him, must for ever stand between them, he reflected. Then had come the unexpected meeting with Madeline, the welcome information that the letter had never reached her, that, blissfully ignorant of his brief infidelity, she still regarded herself as engaged to him.

He accepted the precious treasure of her love thankfully, gladly, as a gift of which he was unworthy, yet, failing which, he would have found it hard to live. The letter had somehow miscarried. Its contents should ever remain a secret to her. In return for this restored happiness, so undeserved on his part, he would do his utmost to atone by love and devotion for the wrong she had unconsciously suffered. Fate had been kind to him, after all, in some respects. It had suppressed that letter.

Horace Fielding had escaped punishment by quitting England for the continent, leaving no address behind, after that *escalandre* at Caroline-terrace, Camden-town. His sister, Lady Roscoe, to whom he had reluctantly admitted it when compelled to ask her for funds, wrote to Joshua Vernon, disclaiming any previous knowledge of her brother's dishonourable act, and expressing her sincere regret at what had occurred.

Uncle Joshua responded in a strain of formal courtesy, accepting Lady Roscoe's explanation without demur, as it regarded her-

self, yet in no wise disguising his opinion of Horace Fielding's conduct.

Madeline and her uncle had accompanied Gervase Talbot to Inglesfield for the foundation ceremony. They stood a little apart from him in the crowd—Madeline thickly veiled, and full of nervous anticipation, Uncle Joshua grimly pleased with the punishment and disgrace—so well-merited—in store for Percy Dennison.

He, unconscious of the Nemesis awaiting him in the crowd, is chatting with his guests, every now and then welcoming some new arrival, his dark, saturnine face radiant, for once, and smiling. It is pleasant to be regarded as a man of considerable local importance, a public benefactor, to command the society of bishops and countesses, and Percy Dennison thoroughly enjoys his enhanced position. No vision of the far-away leper island and its miserable inhabitants seems to dim his happiness and satisfaction as he stands there, laughing and talking in the radiant sunshine.

Gervase Talbot set his teeth hard as the white-robed procession of choristers, followed by the clergy in cassocks, snowy surplices, academical hoods, and elaborately embroidered stoles, drew nigh. After prayer and singing the stone was declared to be well and truly laid by the pretty countess, dressed from head to foot in mauve. Then followed more singing, and the thoughts of those present began to stray towards the luncheon prepared for them at Inglesfield House.

The vicar's speech came next. In it he alluded to the generosity and munificence displayed by the owner of Inglesfield Park in supplying the stone with which to build the new church, tendering his own thanks for the gift, as well as those of his parishioners.

"The rightful owner of Inglesfield is here in person to acknowledge the speech just made!" cried a clear, ringing voice, as Gervase Talbot, removing his hat, strode forward into the midst of the astonished group.

Percy Dennison's dark face became corpse-like in its pallor. He resembled some desperate beast at bay.

"You here!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, staggering back against the woodwork and scaffolding.

"Yes! alive and well," was the response.

"No thanks to you though, Percy!"

"It's Mr. Talbot, that was missing, come back again," runs round the outside crowd, all craning their necks to see and hear better. "Sure enough, it's Mr. Talbot," and then an attempt was made to raise a cheer.

Gervase put up his hand to check it. Then he glanced round the little circle of well bred, fashionably-dressed men and women, their faces expressive of intense curiosity, while just beyond them he saw the expectant choristers and the clergy; the latter apprehensive lest any scandal should mar the ceremony just concluded.

"You are doubtless at a loss to understand why I have thought fit to announce my return in such abrupt fashion," he said, in clear, steady tones amidst the universal silence. "Since my cousin, Mr. Dennison, is silent, I will explain the circumstances that led to my disappearance, and then leave you to form your own opinion of him."

Briefly and succinctly he recounted the events of that fateful night, the invitation to Percy Dennison's rooms, the drugged wine, the sea-voyage, and his experience of the Hawaiian leper island, describing, in conclusion, his escape from the horrible fate intended for him, and his return to England.

A deep, drawn breath, a profound shudder, went round his immediate audience as he ceased speaking, while from the less aristocratic one outside arose groans and yells, intended for Percy Dennison. Those standing by fell away from him, as if they had discerned in the detected plotter a moral leper, whose silence served to prove his guilt.

"I could have forgiven him more easily," said Gervase Talbot, sternly, "had he at-

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tempted to blow my brains out and failed; but the devilish malignity of the scheme adopted in order to obtain possession of the estate, which I had refused to sell to him, renders it unpardonable. Percy Dennison, had you no spark of pity or humanity left in you for the man you sent to such a living death?"

Beyond a significant scowl, expressive of deadly hatred, the wretched criminal made no reply.

"Shall I arrest the gentleman, sir?" asked the village constable, elbowing his way towards Gervase Talbot.

"No," was the answer, waited for amidst breathless silence. "He is free so far as I am concerned. My vengeance stops short at publicly disgracing him, and dragging him down from the position he sinned so deeply to obtain. I have unmasked and denounced him—that is sufficient. The sooner he quits Ingfield, never to return to it again, the better."

A dissentient murmur greeted this decision. Public opinion was in favour of Percy Dennison being far more severely punished. Gervase Talbot's forbearance did not meet with approval. In the confusion of hand-shaking and congratulations that ensued the barrister slipped away, as he hoped, unperceived.

"I shall be glad if you will consent to carry out the original programme, so far as to lunch with me at Ingfield House," said Gervase to the friends who surrounded him, while Madeline, recognised by now, came in for a large share of attention.

A few declined, but the majority accepted the invitation. Blue blood seldom refuses a good feed at somebody else's expense. The news had reached the servants at the House, and they were drawn up in the front hall to receive their new master when he arrived with Madeline Vernon, soon to become his wife, leaning upon his arm.

(To be concluded in our next.)

DULCE'S INHERITANCE.

PROLOGUE.

It was Paris—Paris before her latest change of Government, when, however much France despised her ruler in secret, she was yet to outward eyes safe and prosperous under the rule of the third Napoleon.

The train from Calais came steaming slowly in on the evening of a baking August day. Then arose a regular skirmish, a babel of tongues, one vast confusion, and among it all a tall, middle-aged man, unmistakably English in face and figure, stood with a bewildered air, as though the strange bustle around him had completely taken away his presence of mind.

"What a face!" murmured one young man dressed in the last style of Parisian elegance to his companion. "Looks as if he had lost his wits. It would be a charity to take a ticket for Hanwell or Colney Hatch, and despatch him by the next train."

The voice was clear and distinct, the accent decidedly that of a native.

The first English words which fell on John Stone's ear in the French capital were those cruel, sneering ones. He heard them, and a strange, pained look came upon his face. He was turning away, when the man to whom they had been spoken, a mere lad in his teens, shook off his companion's arm, and, with a look at him of well-merited reproach, came forward and addressed Mr. Stone.

"Can I be of any use to you, sir?" he asked, quietly. "You seem to be a stranger here, and I am, so to say, at home."

There was an air of respect, a touch of native kindness in his manner; his whole appearance differed, too, from that of his comrade. His dress, though perfectly neat, showed signs of

economy, if not of poverty; and, in spite of his youth, he had a troubled and somewhat careworn expression, as though he had begun life's struggle early, and found it a hard one.

Mr. Stone accepted the assistance as simply as it was offered.

"I never was out of England before," he said, quietly, "and though I suppose I learned French when I was at school, I can't understand a word of it. I want to get my luggage out of these fellows' clutches, and to find a respectable hotel, where I shall be able to make them know what I want."

The young man who had suggested Colney Hatch as a suitable residence for the bewildered traveller had departed by this time.

Noel Bertram made his way to the men who were examining the luggage, and rapidly assured them Mr. Stone's solitary portmanteau contained no prohibited articles. This and a very brief inspection satisfied them. Then he called a *fiacre*, and would have wished the stranger good day, but that Mr. Stone forcibly detained him.

"If you are not very busy," he cried, appealingly, "do see me safe and sound as far as an hotel where they speak English? I am in Paris on urgent business, and I declare, I am so bewildered, I don't know what to do!"

"I think you had better go the Hotel Bourbon or the Hotel d'Angleterre," said Noel, quietly. "At either you will find plenty of English waiters."

"Which is the nearest to Neuilly? How far off is Neuilly? Can I get there to-night?"

"You can leave your portmanteau at the Hotel d'Angleterre, and then go on to Neuilly in less than an hour. Did you want any particular house there?"

"Maison Ronge, Avenue de Josphine," repeated Mr. Stone, as though he had been saying a lesson. "Did you ever hear of the place?"

"Oh, yes! It is a ladies' school—one of the best in Paris, and much patronised by the English."

Mr. Stone looked immensely relieved.

"And Madame Bellisle is a good woman?" he asked as anxiously, as though his companion had been the father of half-a-dozen daughters instead of a lad in his teens. "They told me so."

"I have always heard her spoken of as kind and trustworthy," replied young Bertram, wondering more and more what the stranger's business with madame could be.

"And I trusted her with all I had!" said the traveller. "My one little ewe lamb!"

The *fiacre* stopped at the Hotel d'Angleterre, and Mr. Stone—or rather Noel in his name—engaged rooms. Then they drove on to Neuilly, and drew up before a large, imposing-looking house situated in the best part of the aristocratic suburb. Young Bertram would gladly have made his escape, but Mr. Stone begged him to remain.

"I shall not be five minutes," he said, appealingly. "My errand here is almost one of life or death! If there is bad news for me, let me at least feel there is an English voice to help me to bear it?"

Bertram began to think his friend might have had some grounds for that suggestion about Colney Hatch, but he was fairly in for the adventure now, and would not draw back. He was interested in spite of himself in this prosaic, middle-aged traveller, who, intensely commonplace, yet seemed to be the hero of some strange drama; so, returning to his corner of the *fiacre*, he promised to await Mr. Stone's return.

He would have been amazed could he have followed that gentleman into the bare and somewhat dreary *salon*. He was not kept waiting; in two minutes Madame Bellisle appeared, a lady of about his own age, who had spent part of her youth in England, and therefore, not only spoke the language, but understood the customs and prejudices of our island.

She greeted Mr. Stone with eager welcome, whatever his business there. No question that his presence was an intense relief to madame.

"Ah, sir," she said, gently, "thank Heaven, you have come!"

"Am I in time?" asked Mr. Stone, with feverish anxiety. "I started the moment I had your telegram!"

"But you," said the Lady Principal; "you are in time, sir. Mademoiselle is yet safe, but her danger was imminent. Another week, and I do not believe all my precautions could have availed. You see, sir," she added, gravely, "he had the law on his side."

"Then the law is abominable," returned Mr. Stone, "if it helps swindlers to despoil honest men!"

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"It is a hard case."

"Hard!" repeated Mr. Stone, scornfully, as though the word seemed to him too "mild."

"It's more than that, madame; it's iniquitous!"

"But let us think of her," said Madame, bringing him back to the subject. "What is to be done?"

"Where is he?"

"He was here yesterday. He returns in three days, armed with what he is pleased to call the power of the law."

"But where is he staying?"

"I have no idea. Stay, though. Of one thing I am certain, the steamers to England are watched. He became so impertinent, I told him I should have no recourse but to place Mademoiselle under the protection of her guardian. I shall never forget his face! He smiled like a handsome demon, and assured me it was just what he wished; that *via* Dieppe, Boulogne, or Calais would suit him equally well!"

Mr. Stone groaned.

"What is the use of being rich," he asked, bitterly, "if one hasn't brains? I could write a cheque for thousands if that would save her, but I can't concoct a single plan to keep her out of his clutches!"

Madame Bellisle looked full of sympathy; in fact, she was intensely interested in the only romance that had ever crossed her path of prosaic school-keeping.

"This is Tuesday," she said, gently; "you are perfectly safe until Thursday. This will give you time to think things over."

"My dear lady, I've done nothing else but think them over for the last twelve years. Do you think I'd ever have parted from the child if I'd seen my way to keeping her with me?" Then he added, in quite a different tone: "I suppose I can see her?"

"If you wish it. But I warn you it will be dangerous!"

"Why?"

"I think he has a spy in my establishment. My utmost vigilance has failed to prove anything, but of the fact I feel sure. Now, my good sir, no spy can make anything of the fact that a strange gentleman calls to see me. In the long holidays parents often come about their daughters arriving in the new term; but, depend upon it, a visit to her would be reported!"

"I see. And you advise me—"

"I cannot advise you," said the French woman, slowly. "I never heard a sadder story. I never heard of a greater villain than that man; but he has the law on his side!"

Mr. Stone went back to his *fiacre* and the youth whose company he had so desired.

Noel Bertram could see the anxiety stamped on his face, and asked feelingly,—

"Were you in time?" for he had formed the theory that his strangely had a daughter at Madame Bellisle's, and her serious illness had called him to Paris.

"In time? Yes. I have till Thursday which to form my plans; but I never was good at invention. I can make money easily, but I have no ideas!"

"Ideas can be bought," said Noel simply.

"and there are some of the best doctors in the world in Paris now."

John Stone shook his head.

"Doctors cannot help me!"

"I thought you perhaps had a daughter dangerously ill?"

"I have a daughter in sore danger!" said Mr. Stone, frankly. "I don't even know your name, but I like your face, and I think you would be true!"

"I never deceived any one in my life," was the boy's answer, "and I will keep whatever you tell me secret; but if your daughter is ill, surely it would be better to consult a doctor?"

"I did not say she was ill. I said she was in danger. She is the daughter of my heart; but she was not born so. There are others who have never seen her face, and yet think they have a greater claim on her than I who took her from her mother's dying arms. Unless I can devise some means of seeing her, she will be lost to me for ever in three days. I have money, heaps of money, but money cannot profit me."

"Yes, it can," answered Bertram, coolly, "money can buy all things save health. Why, if you are only rich enough, and have twelve hours' start, you can defy the whole world."

John Stone looked at the youth in bewildered admiration; but he only asked, succinctly,—

"How?"

The answer was as brief as the question.

"Spain!"

"Spain!" repeated Mr. Stone, more amazed than ever. "What should I do in Spain?"

"There is no extradition treaty with Spain," explained his companion. "A murderer or thief who took refuge there would not be given up to the English Government; therefore, sir, I take it the young lady could not be forced from you if you had once reached Spain with her in safety. Of course I am not proposing you should live there, though I daresay, with English servants and plenty of money, even that could be made enjoyable. My idea was to go to Spain until the present search was over, then hire a yacht, and land at some obscure country place on the English coast. Surely among the remote villages of Cornwall, or in some quiet northern seaport you could hide yourselves from all pursuit?"

John Stone seized the young man's hand, and gripped it with an energy that was almost painful.

"Heaven bless you!" he muttered, hoarsely. "I never saw your face before, and yet you have saved me from a sorrow worse than death. You must be a genius to have thought of such a thing; but even that would not have helped me had not the kindness of your heart prompted you to come to the aid of a lonely traveller. I shall be grateful to you all my life."

Noel smiled.

"Indeed, you overrate my services, sir. I am only too glad to be of use to you. I am busy all day in a merchant's office; but I could come to your hotel to-morrow about seven if I could help you make your plans."

Mr. Stone accepted enthusiastically.

"You have a head on your shoulders," he cried, "and now about this hotel. I'll stay there to-night, and let them think in the morning I'm going back to England. That will put them off the scent, and I suppose there is somewhere else I can go to."

"A hundred places!" replied Noel, warming with his interest. "Better let me take you a room at the Fête de Roi. It is a very small place, and no one would think of looking for an Englishman there."

Mr. Stone duly spent the night and following day at the Hotel d'Angleterre; but at dusk he met his young ally and was conducted by him to the Fête de Roi, a small and rather dingy inn near the Faubourg Montmartre.

"It will be quite easy, sir," said young Bertram, who had made all inquiries. "The train for Bordeaux starts at daybreak to-morrow; there you can engage a courier and maid,

and secure a passage to almost any Spanish port."

Mr. Stone was delighted.

"It sounds like magic!"

"It was quite simple, sir. Now, had you not better go to Neuilly and warn Madame Bellisle of your plans?"

The two strangely assorted companions went to the Maison Rouge—Noel, as on the previous occasion, waiting outside.

Madame thought the plan excellent; she often took the papils for déjeuners in the country during the holidays. The carriage should come as though for one of these. Once beyond the house she would leave the other girls under care of the English governess, and drive with her precious charge to the railway.

"Come and dine with me!" pleaded John Stone to young Bertram; and, after a little demur, the young man consented.

"You have done me a greater service than you can imagine!" said Mr. Stone, heartily, when dinner was over, and they were established at a little marble-table in the open air sipping their coffee. "Only tell me, is there nothing I can help you in return?"

Noel shook his head.

"I have done very little for you, sir. You overrate it!"

"I don't think so! Do you live in France? Have you relations? What are you doing?"

Noel laughed.

"I am a clerk, sir! I daresay someday or other I shall earn three hundred a year. I shall consider myself a rich man if that time ever comes. My parents are dead, and I have but one relation who acknowledges me. We are poor, but we have no debts. I am young and strong. I have had a fair education, and I am not afraid of work, so that the future has no terrors for me!"

"You must have holidays sometimes?" said John Stone. "Promise me to spend the next with us in England?"

Noel smiled.

"If ever fate takes me to England I should like to call on you, and hear the end of this romance," the boy said, simply; "but I would rather not visit you. You are evidently a rich man. I am poor and proud."

"You won't be poor always!" said John Stone, kindly. "You have it in your face that you will get on; and, as for being proud, I like a young man to have self-respect!"

"I expect you would say I had too much!" returned Noel. "My father married—as the world terms it—beneath him, and none of his family would look at my mother—the sweetest, truest woman Heaven ever made. She died, sir, of an illness hastened by poverty and want. By her coffin I swore never to take sight from my father's family until I was their equal. So you see I am not likely to go to England just yet! My uncle has a large fortune. My income is fifty pounds a year. I don't think I shall ever settle in my native land just because I can't bring myself to bear the rôle of 'poor relations'!"

It was characteristic of John Stone that he never offered the lad money. He seemed to recognise him as one to whom it would be an insult, but he took from his finger a gold ring, in which gleamed one large diamond of priceless value.

"You will not refuse this as a souvenir of our meeting. You will be young still when I have gone to my last account. You may meet many people in distress; but it will never be in your power to do more for any of them than you have done for me! This ring has been in our family for centuries. I should like to think you would wear it; and think sometimes of a man whose declining years you spared from misery!"

Noel hesitated no longer.

"I will accept since you wish it!" he said, frankly; "but I cannot wear it till I have made my fortune. My employers would think I had stolen it, at the least!"

A week later, Noel passing by the Fête de Roi, was accosted by one of the garçons who

knew him well by sight. A letter had come from the "Milor Anglais."

The establishment had never mastered his name, enclosing a note for a hundred francs, and begging the proprietor, if he could possibly discover the address of Mr. Noel Bertram, to transmit to him the enclosed slip of paper.

The host being an honest fellow, and not averse to gratify the wishes of such a princely person as his late guest, had directed the waiter to keep a sharp look-out for the young gentleman, and hand him the message.

Noel took it absently, and did not open it until far out of sight of the hotel. It was a single sheet of foreign writing paper, with two lines written near the foot in strange, crabbed hand,—

"Safe, thank Heaven! My undying gratitude will be yours all my life!—J.S."

"I am glad," thought the young man, as he walked briskly back to his office. "I'm very glad it's all right; but that girl ought to be a miracle to repay him for such affection." "I wonder," he mused, half cynically, "whether a day will ever come when he regrets the assistance he is now so grateful for?"

Mr. Noel Bertram was to regret it bitterly, whether Mr. Stone's feelings changed or not. A day would dawn when the young clerk would have given a great deal never to have seen the rich man's face.

He only spoke of the episode to two people, and to them he told the story very differently. To the foppish young man who had witnessed his meeting with John Stone, he one day carelessly exhibited the ring, and said coolly,—

"Now, Browne, confess it's better sometimes not to laugh at people if they do seem a little queer? This came from the individual you wished to consign to Colney Hatch."

"He gave you that?" exclaimed the indignant Browne, "just for speaking a few sentences for him and recommending an hotel! Why, man, it's a diamond of the first water!"

"He gave me that," returned Noel, "for the services you mention, and one other."

"What was the other? Surely you didn't take him into a very crowded thoroughfare and then protest you saved his life by dragging him from under the horses' feet?"

"I never thought of that. Really, Browne, your imagination does you credit. No, I simply advised him where to take his daughter."

Browne giggled.

"Ah! he had a daughter, then? Perhaps she was as favourably impressed with you as her very eccentric papa?"

"I never saw her."

"What is her name? How old is she?"

"I never heard her name. I suppose she is about fourteen. She was at school here."

Browne gave another sniff.

"You'll tell me next you don't know his name, I suppose, or where he came from?"

"His name is Stone. He comes, I think, from Highshire, but I never asked him."

"Really, Bertram, your simplicity is too ridiculous. You are sure you don't pretend you never heard of the Stones of Stoneleigh?"

"Never," replied Noel. "I am more French than English, you know."

"Well, even French people have heard of Stone of Stoneleigh, I suppose. He came into a million of money at his father's death, and he has gone on making more till he is fabulously rich, besides coming of the oldest family in the county. Why, the Stones of Highshire have refused a peerage before now. Well, some people have all the luck. To think that old fellow should be master of Stoneleigh! If I had only known it!"

"You wouldn't have made that little speech about Colney Hatch, I conclude?"

"I would have made myself indispensable to him. Here, let me look at that ring again!" and he examined the motto engraved inside. "Just as I thought, there's no mistake. That old fellow who looked so woe-begone because he couldn't speak French is Stone of Stoneleigh, and has rather more than two thousand pounds a day, without

speaking of his capital, which is so enormous I don't suppose anyone but his lawyers know the exact amount. If I had been in your shoes, Bertram, I would have stuck to him like a leech, and ended in marrying his daughter."

"I think nineteen rather too young to take to myself a wife," said Noel, lightly. "Now, you have the advantage of me by three years."

"And you did not even see her?"

"Not once."

"You know he simply worships her. I have friends who know Highshire well, and, of course, I've heard the story over and over again. Stone was over head and ears in love with a penniless girl, who jilted him when the wedding-day was fixed, and ran off with an adventurer. Stone was disconsolate for a year, then he went to the Continent, and in the course of his wanderings met with his old love, who was a widow by that time; married her, and as she didn't care to face Highshire, where her story was in everyone's mouth, he lived abroad till she died, then he came home with one child, and a deep hatred."

He was giving Noel the clue to poor John Stone's misery now. The young clerk could fill up the gaps in the story he had listened to so eagerly. Of course, Mr. Stone had never been married at all. His lost love was not a widow, but a deserted wife when he found her, and the child he loved so jealously was not his own, but the offspring of the marriage which had caused his greatest disappointment. Content to forget his daughter through her childhood, the inhuman father now laid claim to her, thinking, no doubt, the millionaire would come down liberally with bribes to retain his treasure.

"He need not have been so anxious," thought Noel, cynically. "The real father would have waved his claim for a good round cheque!"

He was utterly wrong in this statement, though no picture he could imagine of the man's character would have been blacker than the reality. He asked young Brown casually,—

"Did you ever hear the name of Mrs. Stone's first husband, the man she eloped with?"

"Rather! It was Denzil Netherton, one of the greatest scoundrels who ever went unhung."

CHAPTER I.

It was almost seven years since John Stone took that sudden journey to France, and that still less premeditated tour in Spain. He spent twelve months at Madrid, where Dulce learned to wear a mantilla and play the guitar, besides other more valuable accomplishments. They were devoted to each other, and even exile was sweet to them, if spent together. But John Stone was essentially an Englishman, and there were times when he yearned for home, days when he longed for an English landscape or the substantial comforts of his own Stoneleigh.

But he never said a word of this to Dulce. The year in Spain over, he was proposing to her they should hire a yacht and sail round the world, when suddenly relief came. Three lines in an English newspaper ended their exile, and silenced for ever the fears that had tormented them.

On the 7th of August, at Titterton, Devon, suddenly, Denzil Netherton, Esq., sometime captain in the 4th Regiment, aged forty-five!

"My darling!" said John Stone, simply, to the child of his affection, "we are free!"

Dulce! It was not the name given to her in baptism, but one of her father's choosing, because, to his mind, its meaning of "my sweet," best described her.

Dulce looked up with a strange, questioning look in her blue eyes, and John Stone placed the newspaper in her hand.

"Oh, father!" She always called him so. Never to herself or any human creature would she acknowledge another's right to that sacred name, "Oh, father, is it true?"

"Yes."

"And am I very wicked that I can't be sorry, that I can't feel anything save that I am safe, that no one in the whole world can rob me of you now?"

"Darling!" said John Stone, simply, "you are not wicked. No one could expect you to mourn the man who broke your mother's heart. Dulce, you are all my own now, and the future looks fair before us. Tell me, child, what shall we do?"

"We will go home!" announced Dulce, joyously; "not to Stoneleigh though, where everyone would ask questions. Father, can't we live somewhere in England near enough to London, for you to go to the club, and yet far enough away for there to be flowers and sunshine?"

Mr. Stone smiled at her enthusiasm, but Dulce's wishes were always his. They went to London, and soon found a bijou villa in the quiet old suburb of Chiswick—a villa whose grounds sloped to the river's banks, and whose roses would have taken prizes at a show. And here the two settled down with their maids, a gardener and groom.

Masters came from London to teach Dulce accomplishments, and a dear old lady, the widow of a friend of John Stone's youth, accepted the post of housekeeper and chaperon to the motherless girl.

It was a sylvan existence, cloudless as a summer sky.

Dulce went to London sometimes to see pictures and hear concerts. Sometimes at Chiswick the old bachelor clergyman would come in to dinner, or the grey-haired doctor would look round to play a rubber of whist. But of friends of her own age, young bright acquaintances, Dulce was destitute. She wanted no one, she said, while she had her father; and John Stone was well content to take her at her word.

And so seven years slipped by, changing the seemingly child of thirteen, who had been the darling of Maison Rouge, into a graceful maiden of twenty, as innocent of the world's cruel doings and of its perils as any cloistered nun.

Dulce knew that her father was rich, and that he loved her better than all the world. Yet it never occurred to her that she was an heiress, just as it never dawned on John Stone to think of the days when Dulce should belong to anyone but himself, until Mrs. Leslie one morning suggested seriously that, now Dulce was almost twenty, surely it was time she entered society.

"Whatever for?" he inquired, quite forgetting that his mother had been a leader of fashion, and both his sisters (now married and in distant lands) had courted to the Queen.

"It is customary," persisted the dear old lady. "You forget Dulce is not a child any longer. She is Miss Stone of Stoneleigh, the representative of one of the oldest families in Highshire. She ought to be presented to Her Majesty and have a London season."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the millionaire, and he meant just what he said. There were reasons, urgent ones too, why he would not allow his child to be presented at Court, yet Mrs. Leslie's words had more effect on him than he chose to own, and it ended a day or two later in his proposing to Dulce to go to Stoneleigh.

"You know, child," he said, gravely anticipating the protest written on his face, "it is your rightful home."

"Not mine!"

"Yes, yours," persisted John Stone. "Since it is mine, and I value nothing that I have, except that I may see you enjoy it! Dulce, why are you set against Stoneleigh?"

"Have you forgotten. It was there he came! There I first heard the truth."

"Perhaps it would have been kinder to

keep it from you; but I wanted you to be prepared. I knew if once he saw you he would tell you the story cruelly distorted!"

"I would rather know it."

"He is dead now, child! Has been in his grave for years! Surely his memory need not set you against Stoneleigh, a place you used to love!"

"I loved it as long as I felt I had a right to love it!" cried the girl. "Now the very hall seems to cry out to me that I am an alien, that I have no claim to the name I bear!"

"My darling! You must not have such fancies—you must not, indeed. Could I love you more if you had been born my daughter?"

"No; but—"

"And," he went on cheerfully, "mine is one of those cases where I can please myself and wrong nobody! None of my property is entailed. The only two relations I possess are childless women, already rich enough to need nothing wealth can buy them. As for the name name, Dulce, I mean you to take it legally when once you are of age, unless—"

"Unless what, papa?"

"Mrs. Leslie has been telling me you are a woman grown," said John Stone, simply. "Don't you know, Dulce, many girls marry before they are nineteen?"

"I shall never marry," returned Dulce, "I don't believe in that sort of thing!"

John Stone was amused at the expression.

"And why not?" he demanded. "Surely, Dulce, you can't know very much about it!"

"Well, no!" confessed the young lady, "but quite enough. I never spoke to a young man since we came to England; but then you know I have read plenty of novels!"

"I suppose so!"

"And things always go wrong in them directly a lover appears; trouble and quarrels come the moment there is ever a mention of him!"

"Well, Dulce, I never want to lose you, and so, for my part, I should be thankful if you kept to your eccentric opinion; but, dear, you must see a little more of your fellow-creatures. It is only fair, and so I propose that we go home to Stoneleigh this week, and after a fortnight to shake down, fill the house with guests. The preserves should be worth shooting, the place used to be famous for its partridges, so I daresay we can persuade a good many people to come to us for the first."

"It will be horrid," objected Dulce, "and you see, papa, you forget we know nobody!"

"My dear child, I know everyone in Highshire, that is, everyone who lived there seven years ago; and county mansions don't change tenants like a row of suburban houses. It may in one or two chance cases be a different head, but the family will be the same. Why, Dulce, surely you remember the people who used to spoil you when you were a little girl?"

"And tell me I was not like my father?" said Dulce, flushing hotly. "I didn't mind it then; but papa, how am I to bear it now that I know?"

"You think too much of a trifle, dear, you do, indeed! There is no one who can possibly guess the story of your birth."

"There is Madame Bellialle."

"Who has already proved herself true as steel! Surely you can trust her, Dulce?"

"And did you tell me one else?"

Mr. Stone felt uncomfortable.

"Only one other person, Dulce. It is entirely to his skill and ready wit we owe our escape; but for Noel Bertram, my child, I should have lost you seven years ago. I tried hard to find him when I came home, but you know the war had brought many changes to France, and I could only learn that after serving as special correspondent for some English paper he had got an appointment in the East! But for that I should have insisted on his coming to us, and starting him in whatever profession he preferred."



["MY DARLING!" SAID JOHN STONE, SIMPLY, "WE ARE FREE!"]

"Perhaps he is dead?" said Dulce, slowly. "Oh, no! I can't tell why, but I am certain he is not dead."

"How can you tell, father?"

"Because, Dulce, I believe firmly in presentiments, and I feel sure Noel Bertram will yet return to England and make your acquaintance."

"I'm not anxious to know him!"

"Why not?"

The girl shook her head disdainfully.

"I don't like promiscuous young men, and I hate protégés!"

Mr. Stone looked troubled.

"Dulce, don't you realise what we owe that young man? Child, try and think of what must have happened but for his ready wit?"

Dulce pouted. She was a charming girl, but she was by no means perfect.

"Anyone else could have suggested Spain," she said, petulantly. "There was no genius in it!"

"Well, child, there was no one else there to suggest it. Dulce, don't talk slightly of what Noel Bertram did for us, it hurts me!"

Dulce kissed him lovingly.

"I'll believe Mr. Bertram is a paragon rather than you should be vexed, dear; and when he comes back to England, if you'll invite him to Stoneleigh, though I feel certain I shall detest him—I promise faithfully to treat him like a prince!"

"I should like to do something for him," said John Stone, wistfully. "You see, I liked him."

"You can't do anything till you find him."

"I meant in my will."

Dulce stuffed her fingers into her ears.

"You are not to talk about dying," she said, reproachfully. "You know I can't bear it!"

"But, dear, the parting must come some day, and I would fain have things ready."

"Leave everything to Mr. Bertram if you like!" said Dulce, impulsively, "only don't talk about it; I can bear anything but that!"

Mr. Stone spent a morning in consultation with his lawyers before he left London, and on the very eve of his departure he signed an imposing looking document, which was no other than his will.

"I feel easier now," he said to Mr. Clinton, the head of the firm who had managed the affairs of the Stones for years; who was, moreover, a clever man and able lawyer, though he had never even suspected the secret of John Stone's life.

Hubert Clinton shook his head.

"It is always wise for a man to set his affairs in order; but I consider this document," and he touched the parchment, "a grievous mistake. I hope ere long you will realise the cruelty of its provisions, and give me different instructions."

"I shall never make another will, Mr. Clinton. I have thought long and carefully over this one, and am sure it secures my daughter's best interests."

Mr. Clinton bowed.

"Then I must differ. It would be an unlucky thing for the young lady if this will ever came into force; better far that you should die intestate."

John Stone smiled, and held out his hand.

"You are a good fellow, Clinton, and you have known me for years. Believe me it is no idle caprice that makes me disregard your advice."

Hubert Clinton did not refuse the offered hand.

"I know you have a right to do what you will with your own, and I have now to remonstrate. You must pardon my well-meant advice."

"Readily! And you will be as true to Dulce as you have been to me?"

"I will serve Miss Stone to the best of my power, for your sake and hers."

They went down to Stoneleigh the next day, and triumphal arches were erected in the village lanes. The cottagers were gathered in crowds along the route from the station to

the park, and shouted a hearty welcome to the man who for forty years had been a kind, considerate landlord, and the girl who must one day fill his place.

The old servants were assembled in the hall, and greeted their master and his child with earnest warmth. Only when Dulce and her father had gone to their rooms the housekeeper said slowly,—

"It's a sweet face, and a true one, but she's not like the family, more's the pity!"

"She's the model of her mother!" said the butler, in extenuation; "and it's likely the master's best pleased that she is."

Mrs. Bond shook her head.

"She's got her mother's hair right enough! It's the very shade; but the mistress had light eyes, the very palest hazel; and the master's are grey. Where in the world does Miss Dulce get her eyes, which are as blue as two pansies?"

(To be continued.)

MANKIND IS GROWING.—A European scientist, who has been making measurements of the bodies of the ancients, thus summarizes the result of his investigations, and shows that men are larger now than they were thousands of years ago: "I have measured a great many Roman coffins, and my average shows that the Roman could not have greatly exceeded five feet five inches. In taking measurements of ancient armour, I find that the English aristocracy have decidedly increased in average height within 500 years. I measured twenty-five mummies in the British Museum as nearly as I could through the cases, making estimate for wrapping, and I found the average height of males 61 inches, females 55 inches. The mummy of the celebrated Cleopatra measures about 54 inches, about the height of the present European girl of thirteen. The most ancient mummy of an Egyptian king yet discovered measured 52 inches."



["IS HE MUCH HURT?" MAYSIE ASKED, IN AN AWESTRICKEN WHISPER.]

NOVELLETTE.]

MAYSIE.

CHAPTER I.

The spring sunshine was glorifying the tall larches about Stretton's Farm, lighting up the copper beeches and silver-stemmed birches, the young greenery of the horse chestnut, the sycamore's waving branches rustling pleasantly in the scented breeze sweet with spring perfumes; the budding lilac, the starry primroses, the great clump of yellow daffodils; the gold, purple, and white of the crocuses, that were fast being succeeded by the sweet-smelling hyacinths, the white violets peeping out modestly from odd corners, all helped to perfume the breath of the bright May morning.

In the copse was every shade of green. The cornfields were decked in spring's favourite colour—the blades a grassy hue—that by-and-by would be transformed by the sun's hot rays into rolling waves of gold. Masses of white and pink May decked the hedges, and in the orchard the snowy blooms of the apple-trees glittered amongst the leaves, and the cherry and greengage trees reared a wealth of blossom, standing out in vivid relief against the darker background of foliage, while over the long, lone house climbed and trailed branches, that, just budding, gave promise of a wealth of roses and fuchsias later on.

"What a beautiful day!" Maysie Hartrey, standing under the old porch, looked up at the azure sky, where the white, fleecy clouds drifted slowly by, dotted here and there by a dark atom, the sky-haunting lark at her matins, and smiled.

"Stunning!" agreed the young man at her side, who, rod in hand, was preparing to depart, and whip the waters of the river that

meandered lazily through the meadows at the foot of their garden, for trout.

"Look at that robin!" pointing at one who sat in the hedge, lamenting, in a shrill voice, that his winter finery had departed. "His red waistcoat has lost all its brightness!"

"Yes! That shows grim winter is a thing of the past."

"Of course! Only there are a heap of other things to show that. Aren't there, Ben?"

"Certainly there are!" agreed Ben at once, "this, for instance!" touching the pretty grey cotton gown she wore that seemed to match her great eyes, and be just the most suitable appropriate thing in the world for her. "It's awfully grand!"

"Nonsense! I made it myself, and it cost me just ten shillings," and Maysie Hartrey pirouetted to show her brother the dress from every point of view.

"I don't care what it cost, it's just jolly, and suits you famously," declared the young fellow, looking at her with honest admiration in his eyes.

"You old flatterer!" she answered, with a soft smile, clasping her hands round his arm. "You think everything I wear is perfection."

"Of course I do," he declared stoutly.

"You always look nice!"

"In your eyes. Not in other people's."

"I know some other people who think more of you than I do."

"Indeed! Who are they?" she asked, without the slight addition of colour in her smooth cheeks.

"I'm not going to tell tales," he rejoined, significantly.

"You couldn't. It's all nonsense, Ben!"

"No, it isn't. But I won't split. Now come out with me, Maysie!"

"I can't!" with a shake of the fair head.

"Why not? It's a shame to lose such a lovely morning. Just think how beautiful it will be down there!" nodding towards the river. "The sunlight sparkling in ripples

along the shallows, the white cloudlets drifting overhead, the birds singing, the breeze swaying the budding branches, the—"

"Why, Ben, you are getting quite poetical! What is the meaning of it?" with a quick glance at him from the long-fringed, clear eyes.

"Am I?" he laughed a little awkwardly. "Oh! it's the weather. You won't think me poetical when I come back with a brace or two of pearly-scaled trout."

"No! I shall think you practical and useful then, as they will go towards filling our rather empty larder."

"You won't come, then?"

"I can't. Don't you forget that I have a guest coming to luncheon with me to-day?"

"Have you? You never told me anything about it."

"Ben! How can you?"

"How can I what?" with a lazy glance at her, as he arranged a fly to his liking in his book.

"Say that I told you a week ago Max Roy was coming here to-day—that he wished to consult me on some matter."

"Oh!" Ben Hartrey turned round and gave his sister a keen look full of interest. "I see. I think I remember something about it. Do you wish me to stay at home and preside at the festive board?"

"No. It is not necessary," she answered, composedly.

"I suppose not, with such an old and intimate friend as Max. Do you know—have you any idea what he is coming about?"

"No. Perhaps it is the mortgage on Arthur's part of the farm. You know there is still a hundred owing."

"Yes, I know," and he met the frank glance of her clear, childlike eyes, and saw that she did not even guess at what was running in his mind. "He, of course, will advise you well," he added, slowly. "He is so clever, such a thorough man of business." "Oh, yes! I shall follow his advice."

"Do," and with a kiss Ben Hartrey went away towards the river; and Maysie, after gathering a few violets and fastening them in the bosom of her gown, went into the quaint old house that had been her home all the days of her young life, and busied herself in preparations for her expected guest.

These preparations were neither numerous nor on a grand scale. Grandeur was beyond the limits of her slender purse, and she never exceeded the amount she and Ben agreed upon for housekeeping.

She had a horror of debt, a dread of it; and no wonder, for her handsome, good-for-nothing father had been a spendthrift, and had squandered his children's inheritance, until at his death nothing was left except the old homestead, "Stretton's Farm," which had been left to his wife by an uncle, and which she wisely had tied up securely for her two children, saving that for them out of the wreck of their fortune. She did not long survive her husband, and Ben and Maysie were left to set up housekeeping alone when he was seventeen and she fourteen, along with old Betsy Raymond, formerly Mrs. Hartrey's nurse, who stuck to them through all their misfortunes, and declared she would never leave the "childther" while there was a breath in her body.

She was a great comfort to the young girl, and helped to steer their bark through stormy waters, and by her economy and cleverness enabled Ben to pay off two of the three hundred that was required to purchase the choice piece of meadowland around the homestead, without which it was practically useless, as it could not be farmed in a satisfactory manner unless grazing land for cattle was secured.

In this good work Betsy was ably helped by Max Roy, son of a neighbouring gentleman-farmer of good means, who had set his only son up as a lawyer in Shelstown, five miles distant, where the young fellow, owing to his ability and pleasant ways, was getting on splendidly, and bid fair soon to have the largest clientele in the place, and distance all competitors in the legal line.

Max Roy and his sister Blanche had been playmates of the little Hartreys from a very early age, and Max had learnt to love grey-eyed Maysie almost before he wore jackets and topers. It was the one wish of his life to make her his wife, the one desire that urged him on to do great things, to win fame and honour, in order that she might be pleased, might be proud of him.

That she was proud of him he had no doubt. She openly told him how much she thought of him. That she loved him—ah, well, that was a different matter altogether, and he was by no means certain that this bonny, grey-eyed lassie did love him as he wished to be loved. They had been so much together, so much like brother and sister, so used to each other, "what wonder," he thought, "if this girl, this almost child"—for she was only just eighteen—"should have no warmer feeling for him than she entertained for Ben." She was just as frank and unembarrassed in her intercourse with him as she was with her brother; and though he had thrown out several hints they hardly seemed to be taken, or at any rate understood by Miss Hartrey, and so he determined to "put it to the touch," to "win or lose all," and he was coming up to the homestead this bright May morning to ask her to be his wife.

"Heaven bless my darling!" he murmured, as he came in sight of the house, and looked eagerly for a glimpse of her figure.

But there was nothing to be seen save the rambling old place, with its decoration of ivy and trailing branches, its queer chimney stacks, from one of which issued a thin wreath of smoke, its empty dog-kennels and silent stables, and emerald lawn studded with noble trees, and weed-grown paths, and semi-neglected flower beds, and general air of picturesque untidiness that spoke only too plainly of want of money and care.

As Max pulled the bell the clangour rang out on the silence, and before it died away Maysie stood in the open door way.

"Why didn't you come in?" she queried, holding out a cool little hand, which he held in his strong, warm clasp rather longer than was absolutely necessary.

"You hardly gave me time," he answered, with a smile, that somehow or other lighted up the honest, sunburnt face and blue eyes in a wonderful manner—made it almost good-looking.

"The door was open; surely you know as well enough to come in without ringing?"

"I hope I do!" he laughed. "Only you see I thought you might be out."

"When I expected you, Max?" looking at him with a world of reproach in the lovely grey eyes, that were just the dearest things to him in all creation.

"Certainly. You might have been in the garden gathering dainties wherewith to regale me."

"And if so, what then? Betsy is here."

"I did not come to see Betsy," pointedly.

"Don't tell her as poor old soul. You know she adores you!"

"I wish you did," he murmured.

"What did you say?" she inquired, as she led the way to the quaint, oak-panelled parlour, where places were laid for two, and the sun-blinds shut out the glare and made it cool and pleasant, and the perfume of wall-flowers and violets mingled sweetly.

"Nothing," he answered, and absently, taking his place opposite her at the table, and commencing operations on some cold salmon that was before him.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" she asked, when they had discussed the salmon, the cranberry tart, the oysters, and other homely dainties prepared by her.

"Something very important; that is, to me," he added, as she turned a pair of startled eyes on him. "Something that concerns myself."

"Oh! Are you going to buy some property about here?"

"No. My father has given me Lowndes Rent, so I shall never want for a home."

"That pretty place! Oh, Max! aren't you delighted?" she exclaimed, with flashing cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully; "I suppose I am."

"You don't seem to care."

"Yes, I do. Only you see the present is incomplete."

"How? The house is furnished."

"True, the house is furnished, but there is one thing lacking."

"What is it?"

"Can't you guess?" leaning forward, and looking straight down into the soft, grey eyes.

"No. How can I?"

"Then shall I tell you?"

"Please."

"It wants a mistress."

"You can easily remedy that," she said composedly. "There are many nice girls in Shelstown. Of course, you will marry now that you have a house of your own."

"Yes, I shall marry," he responded slowly, a chill-sense of disappointment strong on him at her words, and her unconcern, "that is, if the right woman will have me."

"Have you asked her?" she inquired, looking up at him with childish curiosity.

"Not yet," he answered, and then broke out, "Maysie, don't you know, can't you see—it is you I love. Can you ever care for me?"

"Max," the startled eyes met his bewilderedly.

They were standing by the open window, round which the budding creeper crept and clung, and he bent over her, and took her hand in his, and looked at her, all his love shining in his honest eyes.

"Don't be startled, dear! I did not mean to speak so abruptly, only—I could not help it. Look up, child, and tell me you care for me?"

For answer Maysie shook her flaxen head.

"You don't care for me?" he cried.

"I do like you, Max, but—but not as you mean."

"Maysie, think before you decide. It is so much to me, the whole happiness of my life depends on your answer," he urged earnestly.

And she remained silent. She hardly understood his passionate appeal; it almost frightened her. She was only eighteen, and had never been wooed, never listened to a lover's words. What wonder they disturbed her sleeping innocence, her dreaming calm? And then—like all young girls—she had a romantic notion that a lover should be very handsome, and very fascinating—a kind of Sir Galahad and Adonis rolled into one; and this country lawyer was only sensible and honest, and kind, with a plain, good-natured face and frank blue eyes, and was not mighty particular as to the set of his cravat, or the cut of his coat, and did not wear patent leather boots, nor extremely shiny stove-pipe hats, nor lavender kid gloves, but contented himself with thick shooting boots, and a deerstalker, and seldom or never sported a pair of gloves, his strong, sunburnt hands on most occasions being guiltless of any covering; and he was not glib of tongue, nor ready with bonied speeches and compliments, so, altogether, he was hardly likely to win the regard of a young girl who had never taken the trouble to study his deep, earnest nature, and find out all the good qualities, and amiability that underlay the rugged exterior, and reflect what a gentle, tender, devoted husband he would make.

"Maysie, think!" he repeated, his voice trembling with anxiety. "I love you so dearly, can't you care for me a little?"

"I hardly think so," she answered, dreamily, and there was no responsive love-light in the grey eyes.

"You are so young—in time you may," he pleaded. "I will wait as long as you wish."

"Would waiting make any difference?" she asked, naively.

"It might," he replied, at once. "Women sometimes grow to care very dearly for a man when he becomes their affianced husband, though indifferent before."

"I am not indifferent Max, only—only—"

"Only you are not desperately in love with me at present," he said gaily.

"No!" and she smiled up at him. "If you waited, do you think—I should—grow to—to—"

"Love me!" he put in. "I hope so. Will you try? I'll wait just as long as you wish, and I won't bother you only when you know. If it is to be as I wish come to me and say, 'Max, I love you.' Will you?"

She hesitated just the length of a moment, and then said, "yes!"

"My dearest!" and lifting her hands he kissed them tenderly.

"And now for the ring. It is an old family one, and said to be a Milprene!"

"What is that?" she asked, looking curiously at the antique ring he drew from his pocket.

"It is supposed to be formed by the breath of a snake. When struck by a hazel wand they hiss, and the bubble that forms hardens at once into a stone. The possessor becomes wealthy, and the old tradition says—loses love."

"Then I will not have it!" she exclaimed, drawing back, as he offered to put it on her finger.

"But you do not love me—yet," he smiled.

"I may—and—if I take this I shall lose my chance of doing so—have to give up all hope."

"No, Maysie. It is only he or she who already loves becoming the possessor of this who is in danger of losing it."

"Are you sure?" she asked, with grave anxiety depicted on her pretty, winsome face.

"Quite sure!"

"Who told you this tradition about the Milprene?"

"My old nurse, Bridget O'Connor. Do you remember her?"

"Oh, yes, well! She was tall, and wrinkled, and gaunt, her skin like parchment; but her eyes were wonderfully bright, and a beautiful blue."

"Yes! they redeemed her face from hideousness. Regular Irish eyes."

"And it was Bridget told you the legend?"

"Yes! Her head was crammed full of queer tales and traditions of her own country."

"And were they all as weird as this?"

"Mostly. Some more so. She had one about a banshee, that was absolutely bloodcurdling, and she imitated the wailing of the spirit perfectly."

"What was it like?" she demanded, regarding him with dilated eyes.

"Like the sighing and moaning of the wind through leafless branches, on a still, chill winter's night."

"How horrible!" with an irresistible shudder.

"I did not think so in those days. I liked her weird stories, and begged for them nightly."

"A morbid taste, Max!"

"Perhaps. I don't think I should care for them now!"

"You would prefer something merrier?"

"Infinitely!"

"I am sorry you told me about this," she went on, after a pause, twirling the ring slowly round, and regarding it somewhat as she might one of the snakes from whose breath it was said to be formed.

"Why?"

"Because—I shall never feel happy when I am wearing it."

"Dear child, don't think about that foolish story."

"I shall never be able to help doing so now. Let me have another one, Max, please?" she implored.

"Nay, keep it, dearest," he whispered, in his tenderest, softest tone, as he looked in her fair face; "and then when you do learn to care for me the triumph will be greater," and he slipped it on the slim finger, and she was passive, and let it remain there.

This was something gained he thought joyfully. She kept his ring and promised to try and care for him, and he went away feeling a certain amount of contentment, though not quite satisfied; and many were the glances he sent back to the slight, girlish figure standing in the leaf-wreathed porch, in its grey gown, with a knot of white violets at the breast, and the spring sunshine making a halo all round.

CHAPTER II.

"Ben, you are lazy!"

Ben only shook his head, and pointed to a trio of silver-sided trout that lay on the grass beside him.

"Get up, and do some more fishing."

"No thank you. I prefer remaining here," and he let his head droop back into his companion's lap.

"It is simply disgraceful. You get more and more idle every day."

"And who is it helps me to be idle?" he asked lazily, with an upward glance at the pretty gipsy-like face bending over him.

"Certainly I don't," declared Blanche Roy, indignantly. "I am always wanting you to exert yourself—now, in the present instance."

"Well, dear, in the present instance," he interrupted, tranquilly, "the wind blows too strongly up-stream, and my flies would be blown away. I might sit rod in hand for hours and catch nothing. Besides, I am extremely comfortable."

"I have a good mind to go away and leave you."

"You wouldn't be so cruel," he murmured, plaintively.

"I don't know. I think I may be. Now, when we are married do you mean to idle like this?"

"No. I'm too much of a pauper to be able to."

"You're not a pauper, Ben," she corrected.

"Next door to it. I wonder, Blanche, will your father ever consent to your marrying a poor fellow like me."

"He must. I shall make him!" and she lifted her dark head with imperious grace, "and I have more than enough for both."

"Yes, that's just it," he said, ruefully. "It's your money that comes between us, and makes the barrier that is likely to keep us apart. If you had none I should go boldly to Mr. Roy and ask him to give you to me, and take you home to the Farm. As it is, I haven't the courage to ask him to let you live in such a tumble-down place."

"At any rate, I mean to live in that tumble-down place."

"Now if it were like Ker Hall it would be different."

"Not to me; and talking of the Hall do you know that Lord George Kerwin arrived there this morning with a friend, no end of a dandy, in the household troops."

"No, I did not know it," groaned poor Ben, "but it will be all the worse for me. Your father will contrast unfavourably if he wants to marry you."

"Don't talk rubbish; and, Ben, don't you remember last year when Lord George was down here that he had eyes for none but Maysie?"

"Yes, I do remember that he seemed rather spooney on her," admitted Ben, in slightly relieved tones.

"Rather 'spooney!' ejaculated his companion. "Why, he was mad about her, only she never seemed to take the least notice of it and the old Earl was alive then, and of course would not have liked it; he was so conservative, thought people ought to marry in their own rank of life, and, moreover, liked money. All his daughters married wealthy men. I have, thought that Maysie won't have him."

"Do you?"

"I do. Max would be miserable then."

"Ah! I see. He's gone there to-day," nodding towards the Homestead.

"Yes. I hope he'll succeed."

"Does the governor know?"

"I think so. He has given him Lowndes Rest."

"That looks as though he thought Max meant marriage, and as if he approved."

"Yes, doesn't it?"

"I hope he'll be as complaisant over us, Blanche."

"So do I. Have courage, Ben. Remember 'Faint heart,' &c."

"Yes, I must pull my courage together, and storm the sire before long."

"Perhaps it would be best to get matters settled," agreed Miss Roy; and then the young couple sauntered off under the budding copper beeches towards her home.

"Miss Maysie, may we come in?"

Maysie looked up with a start. She was sitting by the window—that identical window where Max had told her of his love, just a week before—engaged in the homely occupation of darning Ben's socks, and for a moment the brilliant sunshine dazzled her eyes; and then she saw Lord George Kerwin bending down to look in at the window, and, standing beside him, a tall, dark man, with a bronzed face and heavy black moustache, and black eyes, whom she felt was different from any man she had ever seen during her short life.

"May we come in?" repeated her visitor.

"Oh, yes, of course!" she said, rising in some confusion, and away went the basket of socks, the balls of wool, lying here and there, and the scissors rattling down on the polished floor with a clatter that made the old black cat, slumbering at her feet, jump up and

hurry off as though she thought the end of the world had come.

"I am afraid we have startled you?" remarked Lord George, as he stepped through the window, followed by his companion.

"You did a little," she acknowledged, shyly, with drooping lids and flushing cheeks, for the stranger's dark eyes were fastened on her face, and confused her.

"I am so sorry," went on the young Lord, regret and concern on his handsome, boyish face. "I didn't mean to. Only I was anxious to renew our acquaintance, and Hartrey told me you were here, so I did not go to the door, but came straight here. I hope you will forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive!" she answered, simply. "You were quite right to do so!"

"Thanks; and now may I introduce my friend?"

"I shall be pleased!" she murmured.

"Mr. Derringer, Miss Hartrey!"

"Charmed to make your acquaintance!" declared Derringer, in a pleasant voice, taking her reluctant little hand in his, and thinking, as he looked at her, that he had never seen anything more fair and sweet than this girl's innocent face, with its frame of flaxen hair, straying in rings and curls over the white forehead, and delicate shell-like ears.

"I hope you won't think me an intruder?"

"Oh, no!" she answered, smiling up at him with soft, shy eyes.

"I feel like one!" he declared, with a laugh.

"Why?" asked Lord George.

"Because you and Miss Hartrey are old friends, and, of course, have no end to talk about, while I am a stranger, and out in the cold."

"You must not—say—that!" she stammered.

"It's partly true!" declared Kerwin. "Of course we have a great deal to talk about. I want to hear how Jenny got on—whether Rob recovered from his bad fall—whether you still have the fox we caught; and whether the speckled hen brought up her brood of ducklings well."

"Beautifully!" declared Maysie, enthusiastically, forgetting her shyness; "and she has some more to bring up now. Only they give her so much trouble. They will go off to the pond."

"Naturally. Their instinct takes them there!"

"Yes; it is as natural for them to go to the water," struck in the cavalryman, "as it is for a fellow to look and look, and look again at a pretty face," and he pointed his speech by staring at his hostess.

"Some natural instincts are not pleasant," observed Lord George, drily, by way of a hint to his friend, for he saw Maysie flush, and look embarrassed. "You must show me the ducklings by-and-by!"

"Yes; and Jenny and her calf."

"And of course Jenny!" he agreed.

"And may I come, too?" inquired the irrepressible Derringer who, being an Irishman, was possessed of an amount of coolness and impudence that astonished most people.

"Oh, yes, if you care to!" she answered.

"Care to!" he repeated. "Why, I take a most lively interest in all rural matters, especially when there is an uncommonly pretty girl in the way!" he added, in low tones.

"Do you?" she said, innocently. "Are you country-bred then?"

"No; I was born in Dublin, and have lived in cities all my life!"

"How odd you should care for the country."

"Yes, isn't it?" he agreed, gravely. "It's the change, I suppose. Everyone likes change!"

"At any rate, you do!" remarked Lord George, rather testily. "You change your friends, your dogs, your tastes regularly once a week!"

"Too severe, my dear fellow," he answered,

lazily lolling back in the old chippendale chair, his handsome head against the carved back; "and not strictly true. How long have I known you?"

"Five years," admitted the other, reluctantly.

"And I have never changed you. So that refutes your libel!"

"Ah, but it's slightly different with me!" exclaimed Kerwin. "You are going to be re—"

"What lovely flowers!" broke in Derringer, quickly, leaning forward and touching a vane of crimson blossoms that stood on the table at Maysie's elbow.

"Yes, they are pretty."

"From your garden?"

"Yes."

"I hope you will take us round and let us see all its beauties—that is, me, let me see. Of course Kerwin is familiar with it all?"

"Of course," agreed the young fellow; "but I shall come and see it again, nevertheless."

"Yes, do," and Maysie gave him a sweet smile that sent the blood coursing madly through his veins, for he loved this little simple country maiden very tenderly, and wished to make her learn to care for him.

So the three went out together into the glow and brilliance of the May morning, and she showed them the speckled hen, who, cooped up, was thrusting her neck through the bars, and clucking vigorously in her endeavours to prevent her alien brood of fluffy children from paddling about in the pond, and Jenny, the tiny Kerry cow, and her diminutive calf, and Rob the cart-horse, and the red rogne who was kept in the kennels, where he had a fine run; and then they went back to the old panelled parlour, and Betsy brought in tea and some early strawberries, and fresh, sweet cream and home-made cakes, and they had a right-down, merry meal, at which Ben assisted, for he had come in from his usual fishing expedition; and while he and Lord George talked of flies, and floats, and trout, and salmon, and the dangers of the weir, and the proximity to it of the stepping-stones, which in the autumn after heavy rains made the crossing then such a dangerous and difficult feat, Mr. Derringer improved the golden opportunity, and talked well and fascinatingly to the innocent young creature whom fate had thrown in his way, and thought that after all a few weeks spent in the country in her society would not be at all dull.

She looked so sweet and fair in the grey dress, with a bunch of violets under the white, dimpled chin, her grey eyes shining brightly, a rose-flush on her cheek as she listened to his stories of London life, and his account of his own recent illness, that had made the doctors order him away from town to recuperate in the quiet of the country.

And that night, when Maysie went to bed, she dreamed that Lord George, Mr. Derringer, and Max Roy were engaged in a three-cornered duel, and that though she was standing near she seemed to have lost the power of volition and was rooted to the spot; even when Max ran Derringer through the heart with his sword she could not move. Only she saw distinctly his white face turned up to Heaven, and the cold moonbeams playing on it as he lay stretched out on the soft, green sward, the blood welling from the wound in his breast.

CHAPTER III.

It was quite wonderful, after that afternoon, what a fancy the cavalry man took to Stretton's Farm. Hardly a day passed that he was not there on some pretext or other. Now it was to consult Ben about a rod or a fly, now to bring a book of poems to Maysie; then he would drop in shortly before their tea hour, and declare plaintively that Kerwin had deserted him as usual and left him to amuse himself, while he went about among his tenants and sought to set things straight on his estate; and then Ben, taking pity on his loneliness would ask

him to stay, and the Irishman eagerly accepted the invitations, and would linger at the farm until late into the night, singing duets with Maysie, looking into her soft eyes, paying compliments, and saying things that might mean a great deal or nothing at all, but that, nevertheless, brought the blood to her fair cheek and made the heavy lids droop.

Maysie liked his society, liked to hear him talk. He was so different from any one she had ever met, so different from poor, plain Max. But then he was only an honest, straightforward, country-bred lawyer, not a *blast*, world-worn man of fashion, whose scruples were few and code of honour shaky, and thought, after all, it did not matter much if he did flirt a little, just to pass the time with this deliciously fresh, naive little maiden, whose soft young beauty was so alluring to him, though he had heard a rumour that coupled her name with Roy's.

What did that matter, though? No one would be any the worse, he told himself hypocritically, for the few pleasant hours he spent at the farm with Maysie Hartrey, and Roy was only a country bumpkin.

Few! He hardly knew himself how frequently he went. It so soon became a habit with him to saunter over there, and drop into the great armchair by the rose-framed window opposite her, and chat away through a whole morning while she stitched industriously; and often, very often, he reappeared in the evening, sometimes in his dress clothes, looking so handsome and elegant, the girl thought, with the diamond studs flashing on his breast, and a gardenia in his button-hole.

"How different from Max!" she murmured to herself, one sultry night, when she and Ben had walked to the end of their own demesne with him, looking after his retreating figure, and giving a thought to the man to whom she had given her promise to try and care for.

"I wonder why he always comes alone now?" remarked Ben, reflectively, also staring after the tall, retreating figure.

"I don't know! Unless it is that Lord George does not care to come here now!" returned Maysie.

"I don't think that is the reason!" said her brother, slowly; and he looked at her fair face with perturbed eyes.

He knew Max loved her—he suspected Kerwin of having a tenderness; and now here was this officer, this weary, fashionable dragoon, paying constant visits to the old homestead, and passing every moment he could in her society. He didn't understand it quite, and he determined to consult Blanche on the morrow.

"Then what is it?" queried the girl plucking a great creamy rose from its stem, and fastening it just under her dimpled chin.

"I can't tell!" he rejoined, somewhat curtly.

Indeed, so differently from his usual urbane manner that she looked at him in surprise, and ceased plucking to pieces the fellow-blossom to that which she had fastened at her collar.

"Ben, you're out of temper!"

"No; I'm not!" he contradicted testily, annoyed to think she had noticed anything strange in his manner.

"My dear, you are!" she insisted, with pretty gravity, laying her hand on his arm.

"Now, tell me what it is?"

"How can I, when there isn't anything?"

he asked, trying to look unconscious, and as though he was speaking the truth.

"Now, Ben, you are fibbing!"

"You're fanciful, Maysie."

"Not a bit! I know you well enough to be aware that something has rubbed you the wrong way, brother mine! Now, do tell me what it is!" coaxingly. "Let me share your trouble, and lighten it if I can!"

"My dear little woman," he said, tenderly, stroking the small hand that lay on his coat-sleeve. "My joys I am always ready to share with you, my prosperity, my pleasures, not my troubles, and adversities."

"How unkind!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, turning away; the next moment she was clasping his hand, and exclaiming, "Are you really in trouble, Ben, *has*—Mr. Roy refused his consent to your marriage with Blanche?"

"No, Maysie, not yet!"

"I am so glad," with a long-drawn breath of relief. "I was afraid you had been to see him, and that his answer was unfavourable."

"I daresay it will be when it comes to the point," he rejoined, a trifle moodily.

"You must hope for the best!" she said, brightly, regarding him with tender, moist eyes.

"It's hard sometimes to hope when everything seems against a fellow."

"But everything is not against you," she expostulated.

"A good deal is!"

"How?"

"I am next door to a pauper."

"Nonsense! You have this homestead!"

"It's half yours."

"Only nominally. You know I gave my share of it over to you long ago."

"Dear child, as though I could take it," he smiled.

"You must!" she rejoined, eagerly. "It is a place any man might be proud to own!"

"If three or four hundred pounds could be spent on it," he broke in.

"Less than that, and Arthur's part is nearly purchased now."

"Seventy-five pounds remains yet to be paid!"

"That is not a great deal; and Mr. Roy would, of course, act liberally towards Blanche, being rich."

"And expect me to do the same, which, being poor, I couldn't."

"You seem to forget that Blanche loves you!"

"No, I don't. That is my trump card, and about the only hope I have. If he is willing Max should marry you—"

"Ben, how do you know that?" interrupted Maysie, flushing scarlet.

"Blanche told me, dear," he muttered, apologetically. "Her father gave Max Lowndes Rest because he told him he meant to marry, and the governor more than suspects who the wished-for bride is."

"In that case," she remarked, after an awkward pause, and in tones that sounded strange and cold even to herself, "he, of course, can have no possible objection to you as a son-in-law."

"I hope not," he responded, kissing her upturned face as she wished him good-bye.

Meanwhile Derringer reached the Hall, and found Lord George waiting up for him in the smoking-room, a gloomy look on his boyish, frank face.

"You're rather late," he commenced, glancing at the timepiece, the hands of which pointed to 12.30.

"Am I?" said the other, indifferently, throwing himself into a chair and nipping the end off a cigar.

"I think so, for the country. Have you been at the Farm?" he asked, after a short silence.

"Yes."

"You go there pretty often," with an angry look in his blue eyes.

"Every day."

"It is to be hoped you are welcome," drily.

"I think I am," returned Derringer, with a laugh that grated on his listener's ears. "At any rate, to the lady!"

"Paul," said Lord George, in husky tones, "have you thought of what you are doing?"

"Doing! my dear fellow!" looking at him with affected surprise. "How? What? Why?"

"You are playing fast-and-loose with an innocent creature who is no match for you!"

"Nonsense, George!" while an angry flush

mounted to his forehead, "what rubbish you talk!"

"It is not nonsense. You are not free; you have no right to try and win her love, and to-day I heard—here the young fellow's voice trembled—"that she—is—engaged to Max Roy."

"And what if she is? I am doing no harm passing a few pleasant hours in her society."

"Is that all? Are you certain she is safe? Certain that she will not grow to care for you?"

"Of course! She is too sensible for that."

"I am not so sure. The last time I went to the Homestead with you she flashed up when you spoke to her, and then paled suddenly. It looked as though you were not quite indifferent to her."

"And I hope I'm not!" broke out Derringer, impetuously. "She's just the fairest, sweetest little thing I ever came across!"

"Paul!" said the other, sternly, "do you mean to act like a scoundrel?"

"I hope not."

"What would Lady Grace say if she knew of this?"

"Nothing!" he replied, with some slight embarrassment. "Lady Grace is a woman of the world, and does not expect me to keep my eyes and admiration only for her!"

"Perhaps not. Still my cousin might not like your openly making love to another woman. She might prefer to have your society herself."

"You mean by that, George," looking at him steadily, "that you think I had better leave this place?"

"I do."

"Well—I can't stay if you turn me out," the other said, turning restlessly on his chair.

"I shall not turn you out, of course, but I think it will be better for all parties that you should go."

"In another month I will," he said, slowly.

"I can't go before."

"You are harder hit than you think for," said Lord George.

"Perhaps I am," agreed Derringer, sullenly.

CHAPTER IV.

"What does it mean, Blanche?" asked Ben of his lady-love, as they paced, the next day, under the copper beeches down by the river-side.

"Maysie is very sweet and pretty, Ben!"

"Yes?" looking at her interrogatively with his bright grey eyes.

"And he is at the homestead you say, often?"

"Every day, sometimes twice a day."

"Then it looks to me as though he likes her, and as though Lord George disapproved of it, so won't accompany him."

"Oh, Blanche, nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense," with an indignant stamp of her foot, "and you ought to stop it for Max's sake."

"How can I?"

"Tell him not to come and visit at your house."

"I can't do that," helplessly.

"Then snub him well."

"Shall I?" doubtfully.

"Of course. Show him his visits are not welcome, and if he has an atom of manliness or spirit about him he won't appear at the homestead again."

"I shouldn't."

"Naturally not, and he must make an effort for poor old Max's sake. He wouldn't care to live without her, I know, and he has looked so moody lately that I more than suspect some hint of the state of affairs has reached him. It is a great shame," she went on, impetuously, "that a worthless, good-for-nothing flirt such as he is should come here, amuse himself for a time, unsettle Maysie, and win another man's whole life."

"It won't be as bad as that," expostulated Ben.

"Oh, yes, it will. Paul Derringer is dangerously fascinating, that I must allow. His flatteries and compliments will dazzle Maysie for the time, and she will appear not to care for Max."

"Then you think she does care for him?"

"I am sure she does. She is unconscious how much she really cares for him. All would have gone well if that man," meaning Derringer, "had never had the misfortune to come here and turn her head with his nonsense."

"I hope he'll go soon."

"So do I; but, of course, he won't until after Lady Lethwicke's dance."

"I suppose not," moodily.

"You may be certain about that. Fancy the opportunity it will be for breathing soft nothings in Maysie's ear!"

"He shan't have a chance," growled Ben.

"You won't be able to help the chances, dear boy," remarked his intended, coolly.

"Why not?"

"Just reflect. At a dance, what can you do?"

"Keep close to her side all night."

"I should hardly like that," with an arch glance at him, "nor Max."

"No, of course not. How stupid I am. Well, I will forbid her to dance with him."

"That plan will never answer with a girl of Maysie's calibre."

"Well—shall we stay away altogether?" with a helpless look of inquiry at his fiancée.

"You can't do that after accepting Lady Lethwicke's invitation, can you?"

"Hardly, I suppose," he agreed, despondently. "What can I do?"

"Give her a few judicious hints if you can."

"Yes."

"And Max will be there to mount guard."

"He knows, suspects nothing, does he?"

"I hope and think not. He is so busy; he is always sure to be the last to hear any piece of scandal, no matter how nearly it may concern him."

"This would very nearly."

"Yes, indeed. It would wound him to the quick."

"I wonder why women always choose dress and pass by pure gold?" he remarked, reflectively.

"They don't *always*," she expostulated, with a meaning and adoring glance at him.

"Generally," he answered, smiling down at her.

"Certainly, Maysie has."

"She is only dazzled, Ben, and flattered by Paul Derringer's attentions. I am certain she cares nothing for him."

"I hope you are right."

"I am sure I am."

"I hope so. Only she may not find it out until it is too late."

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, a touch of uneasiness in her voice and manner.

"I mean," he said slowly, and thoughtfully, "that Derringer may persuade her to marry him, and then, when marriage has opened her eyes to his many faults and imperfections, she may realise that her affections were really given to Max."

"You are right in this supposition, and I hope and pray she may not be induced, by any of his subtleties and flatteries, to become his wife. I shudder at the mere thought of what her life would be, and Max's unhappiness. Poor fellow, he is simply wrapped up in her. She is his thought by day, his dream by night."

"I think she is, and yet she blindly passes his great love by, and allows herself to be fascinated by this puppy, this mean-souled, dishonourable fellow, who isn't worthy to tie Max's shoe-strings."

"Oh, if the gallant dragoon could only hear you!" exclaimed Miss Roy, with a delicious bubble of laughter, adding more seriously,

"she is not to blame; she is little more than a child!"

"And quite as troublesome as one," he rejoined irritably, for he felt sure his dearly-loved sister would somehow or the other come to grief, and wreck her happiness over Paul Derringer, and he couldn't for the life of him see clearly how to prevent it. Women at best were but "kittle cattle," and if he abused him to her she would consider him ill-used, and elevate him to the dignity of a hero, hints she would probably be deaf and indifferent to, while if he left matters alone there was no knowing where or how they would end. Altogether he was in anything save a happy frame of mind, and was staring moodily across the green expanse, to where the river glistened and sparkled along, when an angry exclamation from Blanche made him look up quickly.

"There he is!" she said, nodding towards the water.

"Who?" asked Ben, vaguely.

"Paul Derringer."

"Where?"

"Coming over the stepping-stones."

"I see him. Going to our place, of course," a savage gleam in his grey eyes.

"Of course. To flirt with Maysie, and amuse himself. Pass a few hours pleasantly."

"I'm hanged if he shall!" cried young Hartrey, "I'll spoil his pleasure by being present in propria persona!"

"That's right, Ben!" approved his companion, "don't let it be a *solitude à deux*. They are very dangerous. Go in and spoil sport."

"I mean to, and you must come also."

"With pleasure. It will give me great satisfaction to play marplot to Mr. Derringer," and together the young people set off following in the cavalry man's wake, while he, quite unsuspecting, hurried on, crossed the trim lawn, and, disdaining such ordinary entrance as by the hall-door, went round, and sprang coolly through the open window of the parlour, where Maysie sat trifling with a piece of lace-work, which of late she had taken to working at when it was likely he would come, instead of the more homely occupation of darning socks.

She looked up with a little start and a lovely blush, as his tall figure darkened the window. The next moment he was holding both her hands in his, utterly regardless of the lace-work, which tumbled higgledy, piggledy to the ground, and looking down into her starlike eyes, with something in his own dark orbs that was new, and that she had never seen there before.

"Did you expect me?" he asked, in low, wooing tones—those tones that always stirred her heart so strangely.

"No, yes!—I hardly knew," she faltered.

"Then—are you glad I have come?"

"Oh, yes, very!" she assented, innocently and readily. "We can try those new duets you sent down," rising and going towards the old-fashioned piano.

"No, not yet!" he pleaded, putting a detaining hand on her arm. "We will try those later on. I want to speak to you now. Come and sit here," drawing her down beside him on the antique sofa, and throwing an arm carelessly along the back behind her, so that, though he did not actually touch her, a slight movement would draw her into his embrace.

"How silent you are!" he said, in a husky voice, after a pause, during which his eyes had hungrily gazed on the fair, young face, with its soft curves and dimples, and varying tell-tale colour.

"Am I?" she murmured, an uncommon and extraordinary feeling of shyness strong on her.

"Yes, very! I like to hear you talk. Do you know, Maysie—I may call you Maysie, now?" with an interrogative glance at her.

"Yes!" she assented, shyly, the rose-bloom on her cheeks deepening, while the long-fringed lids drooped lower over the glorious eyes, hiding their light.

"That I could listen to your voice hour

after hour—indeed, for ever!" he declared, passionately.

"For ever means a long, long time!" she managed to say steadily, though her heart beat fast, and stirred the knot of white roses at her breast with its tumultuous pulsings.

"I know it does, and that is why I say for ever. I should never tire of hearing those sweet tones. Of being near you. Maysie, don't you believe me?" and his arm crept nearer the slender waist, and his head inclined towards hers, when suddenly a shadow fell athwart the sunshine streaming in at the window, and Ben Hartrey stood before him, looking rather white, and very stiff and stern.

"Good afternoon!" remarked the master of Stretton's Farm, in anything save pleasant tones.

"Oh, how d'ye do?" returned Paul, in no wise disconcerted by his sudden appearance, and dextrously withdrawing his arm from its close proximity to Maysie's waist. "Lovely afternoon, isn't it? Been fishing?"

"No," growled Ben, savage beyond measure at the other's cool nonchalance.

"Only strolling about doing the *dolce far niente*," laughed the Irishman, audaciously, as he caught sight of Miss Roy's trim figure outside the window, and guessed she had been with him. "Very nice way of passing the time when you have a pleasant companion. Nothing so delightful as to lie on the velvety sward by the river's brink on a June day, looking up at the blue sky and listening to a soft, feminine voice."

"Unless it is lounging on a couch in an oak-panelled parlour, studying the sky through a window and doing most of the talking yourself," retorted Blanche, as she sprang lightly through the casement, and greeted her blushing, embarrassed friend.

"Fairly hit!" chuckled Derringer, who, like most of his countrymen, highly appreciated wit and repartee. "You ought to be an Irishwoman, Miss Roy."

"Very glad I'm not."

"Why?" he demanded. "The daughters of the Emerald Isle are famed for their beauty."

"Good looks are not everything," she returned, looking somewhat pointedly at his handsome but reckless face.

"Are you one of those people who would rather be good than pretty?"

"I don't say that," she exclaimed, a little doubtfully, glancing at the reflection of her bonny, blooming face in the old oak-framed mirror that hung over the mantelshelf, and, despite that it was greenish and spotted, reflected it bravely and truly.

"No, I thought not," he said, sarcastically. "I don't believe the woman exists who would not barter every virtue under the sun for a pretty face."

"You go rather too far when you make such a sweeping assertion," she answered, coldly.

"I don't think that I do," firmly.

"No doubt your experience is vast and varied," she remarked, a trifle spitefully, for she felt angered against this man who was doing his best to ruin her dearly-loved brother's life and happiness.

"I must acknowledge that it is not a cramped one," he replied, with an air of mock modesty that was very exasperating. "I have been in most of the great cities of the world, and seen nearly every type of woman; and I can only say that they all set more store by their looks than they did by anything else, and thought more of a rosy month, a pair of bright eyes, a soft skin, a slim waist, &c., than they did of a sweet temper, a patient nature, or a clever brain."

"You must have come across only the vain ones of our sex," she declared.

"No. Many of these women who valued their personal appearance highly were utterly free from vanity or conceit; charming women, despite that they did their best always at any time of the day or night to look their best

and fascinate any member of my sex who might happen to cross their path."

"Well, isn't it only natural that a woman should wish to look nice in the eyes of those she loves?" and instinctively her black orbs wandered to Ben's flushed, averted face.

"Quite natural," he agreed, urbanely, a malicious twinkle in his eyes; "and that, no doubt, is why you donned to-day this pretty gown," touching with his forefinger the filmy laces decorating the white cambric she wore. "You know you look well in it, that it brings into strong relief the daisy-bloom in your cheeks and the dark luxuriance of your tresses, &c., &c."

"You are quite poetical, Mr. Derringer, over my very commonplace dress!"

"Commonplace or not, it suits you, and you know it!" he declared, stoutly.

"I never said that it didn't!" she retorted, coolly, hiding her annoyance skilfully under an assumption of indifference, for she saw that Ben had understood the gist of his impudent guest's remarks; "and now, Maysie, do give me a cup of tea, like a good child. I am absolutely dying of thirst, or is it too early?" with a glance at the dainty modern timepiece that ticked away briskly on the antique carved mantelshelf.

"Not a bit too early!" declared Maysie, eagerly rising at once, and giving the necessary orders to Betsy Raymond, who answered the sharp ping of the bell promptly, the little hostess being only too glad of anything that might create a diversion, and keep Ben's searching eyes off her flushed, tell-tale face.

"I never get such tea anywhere as you brew!" declared Blanche, holding out her cup for a second edition.

"No, Miss Hartrey's afternoon teas ought to be celebrated!" declared the irrepressible Derringer, as he helped himself to a good plateful of luscious, ruddy strawberries, and a plentiful supply of rich cream. "Don't often get such strawberries as these!" disposing of them rapidly. "Grown them yourself, Hartrey?"

"Yes!"

Ben had confined himself to monosyllable and scowls, but neither had the slightest effect on his Milesian guest, who was as cordial and lively as though he was being entertained by the most genial of hosts.

"What a gourmand the man is!" thought Blanche, as she watched him dispose of the ruddy berries with extraordinary celerity. "How can any woman be fascinated by him? He would certainly disgust me in a very short space of time."

"By the way, Maysie," she went on aloud, "Max asked me to deliver a message to you."

"Did he?" responded the young girl, flushing redly, for she was conscious that Derringer's eyes fastened on her face at mention of Roy's name, and her hand trembled to such an extent that she spilled the tea on to the tray instead of into Ben's cup, which she was replenishing.

"Yes."

"What is it about?"

"That fan he is having made for you to use at Lady Lethwicke's dance."

"Oh! What does he want to know?"

"Whether the sticks are to be tortoiseshell or ebony?"

"I hardly know!" she said, slowly, almost indifferently, for she felt strangely annoyed that the subject of a present from Max should have been broached before Paul, though why she could not tell.

"Decide in favour of tortoiseshell," put in the officer, officiously. "Much prettier and lighter than ebony, and more fashionable too!"

"We don't go in for fashion much in these parts," observed Blanche, sarcastically.

"Don't you really!" he retorted, looking from her pretty gown to Maysie, and back again, with impudent inquiry in his bold eyes. "At any rate, your toilets would not be amiss on a *grande dame* in the Row, and I reckon, as

our American cousins say, that there aren't two prettier dresses in the Park to-day!"

"You flatter us quite too much!" she replied, getting up and favouring him with a sweeping courtesy. "We are utterly overpowered."

"You don't look as though you were," he remarked, coolly.

"Well, Maysie, have you decided?" turning to her friend, and ignoring the plunger.

"Yes. I will have tortoiseshell mounts, please tell Max."

"Very well!" but across Miss Roy's brow swept an ominous frown, for she did not augur well for her brother, from this being led by another's taste. "I will tell him. Have you decided on your dress?"

"Yes. I am going to wear white."

"I hope you will let me send you your flowers for the occasion, white roses!" whispered Derringer, as he approached her, with an empty cup as an excuse.

"You are very kind!" she murmured, confusedly.

"And pray keep me at least six valses?" he urged, in the same low tone.

"I will keep you as many as I can," she agreed, hesitatingly; "but—but—"

"You have heaps of pleasant partners going, and so can afford to snub me and leave me out in the cold!" he sighed, giving her a passionate, bewildering glance.

"Oh, don't say that!" she implored, raising the lovely, shy eyes to his, and dropping them again at once as she met his impassioned gaze. "You shall have the six, I promise."

"Thanka, you are kind!" and he managed to press her fingers as he took the cup from her hand.

"We shall call for you at eight, punctually, Maysie!" broke in Miss Roy, warned to do so by Ben's black scowl, and an ominous clenching of his powerful hands, that boded ill for the gallant plunger's beauty if they made acquaintance in a rough fashion with his face. "I hope you will be ready. You know Max likes punctuality."

"I shall be sure to be ready," returned Maysie. "I don't want to miss any of it. Dances are too rare down here for that!"

"And besides, I hope for the first dance," ventured Paul, *sotto voce*.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to give you that," she said, regretfully. "I have promised it to—Mr. Roy."

"Happy Mr. Roy!" with a sigh. "The second, then, may I claim?"

"Yes."

"How late it is!" exclaimed Blanche, jumping up as the timepiece chimed six. "I shall only just get home in time for dinner, and you dine before, so must be wishing to 'speed your parting guests,' though you don't say so!"

"I had no idea either it was so late," said Derringer, rising and making his adieu, being conveniently blind meanwhile to Ben's stiff manner and curt speech, as he escorted him to the hall door. "Of course you'll stay and dine with us, Blanche?" he asked, as he re-entered the room.

"If you'll see me home I will," she replied, giving him a look that would have satisfied the most exacting lover.

"Of course I will, and I'll give you a kiss now for getting rid of that fellow," suiting the action to the word. "How clever you were over it. I thought he never would go!"

"So did I. And aren't you glad he has gone? The atmosphere seems freer and purer!"

"Of course it does. He pollutes it with his falseness and conventionality. Come, Maysie," he added, stretching out his disengaged hand to her, "we will go for a stroll in the garden while Betsy lays the cloth!"

And together the three went out and strolled through the picturesque, untidy garden, and two were happy with that happiness which comes but once in a lifetime, the rapture of "love's young dream," and the other was silent and thoughtful, and full of unrest.

CHAPTER V.

The night of Lady Lethwicke's dance arrived in due course, and vehicles from Shelton and all neighbouring parts were seen swiftly wending their way towards her charming house between the hours of eight and nine. The stream was long and continuous, for she was a popular hostess, a woman of *ton*, and, moreover, was young, pretty, and not too straitlaced in her ideas as to when and where a ballroom flirtation should end. She was conveniently blind when she came across a pair of young people billing and cooing in a semi-dark corner of the spacious corridor that ran the whole length of her house—never noticed, or at least never commented on the number of times any couple danced together, and had evidently arranged her beautiful conservatory, with its glossy-leaved palms, luxuriant blooms and dim fairy lights, with a view to furthering and promoting love affairs, and inducing offers of marriage to be made in its charmed and retired retreat.

Then everything was done in first-rate style. The champagne was really *cham*, not the juice of the gooseberry; the sherry of old vintage; the claret, Medoc, Comet, and other rare and costly brands; while brandy and sodas were to be had in unlimited quantities, and all sorts of harmless beverages for those who eschewed the fiery juice of the grape. Loos were plentiful, and the suppers always boasted a boar's head, a peacock, aspicks, chickens, plovers' eggs, and every dainty conceivable that was in season.

What wonder, then, that she seldom or never received a refusal from her numerous friends, and that her pretty gaily-lighted rooms were full to overflowing when Maysie entered them, leaning on Max Roy's arm, closely followed by Ben, who was escorting Blanche.

Very pretty she looked in her dress of billowy white tulle, looped here and there with yellow rosebuds, that did not, however, match the huge and costly bouquet of white roses she carried; but seeing that the one was sent her by Paul Derringer and the other by Max Roy, it was not greatly to be wondered at.

Max's heart had misgiven him just a little; but when he asked and was told who the donor of the magnificent bouquet was he soon reasoned himself out of his fears, for he told himself it was only natural a pretty girl like Maysie should attract attention, and be the recipient of such gifts from men, especially as his intentions towards her, and her half promise to him, had not been made public.

Still, lover-like, he would have preferred to keep her all to himself, and not share even a glance or smile with anyone else. This was impossible, of course, and so he schooled himself to look on coolly while she was besieged by a circle of men all demanding dances, and foremost among them Mr. Derringer, conspicuous by his height and handsome face. However, he had secured a round half-dozen, and so could afford to look calmly on his military rival scoring up. Besides, he was not a jealous man, in the ordinary sense of the word, and being honourable and upright himself would have believed nothing wrong in the conduct of the girl he loved unless he actually saw something very reprehensible with his own eyes.

Therefore, when the musicians struck up a waltz he offered his arm and whirled her away from the close proximity of Paul Derringer in a perfectly contented frame of mind, and clasped her to him with his strong right arm, and revelled in the pleasure of feeling her lithe form leaning against him and her breath on his cheek.

"How well our hostess is looking to-night!" he remarked, when the dance was over.

"Lovely, I think!" said his companion warmly, glancing at the graceful figure in pink satin and point lace, and priceless pearls. "Who is that she is speaking to—very pretty, don't you think so?"

"No, I don't admire her," returned Max;

"but then you know I admire only one style of beauty," and he gave her a look that pointed the speech, "and have eyes for none other."

"Bad taste not to admire her; she is very stylish and attractive looking," laughed Miss Hartrey, though a redder bloom glowed in her soft cheeks.

"Dashing is the term I should use," returned her companion, studying the lady in question closely, "and dashing she is, I know."

"Why? How?"

"She is called Jacky Pilkington, though her right name is Mary, and has decided sporting proclivities and tastes."

"Really! I should not have thought so; she looks feminine enough in evening costume."

"You would not say so if you saw her following the hounds at full gallop, or out with the beagles, in a out-away coat, high collar, cravat, and a man's low hat."

"No, it sounds rather masculine."

"And she looks very much so in her everyday attire, I assure you."

"She seems to attract a good deal of attention," observed Maysie, watching the crowd of men that were gathering round her.

"Yes, and there goes Derrington to swell the list."

The girl's cheek paled just a shade as she noted his *empress* and lover-like manner as he bent over the sporting young lady so unlike her in every respect, and a pang shot through her heart as the dashing young woman with a loud, though musical laugh, waved aside her other admirers, and yielding herself to the soldier's outstretched arm floated away with him, her chin resting on his shoulder, her full red lips parted in a smile, her eyes raised admiringly to his handsome face.

The girl could not analyse her feelings, could not tell what made her feel so unreasonably angry and annoyed at the sight of Paul Derringer and Jacky Pilkington dancing together, and seeming to get on admirably well. Was it wounded pride, or was it love that made her sore and nettled, and feel a sudden wish to annoy this gallant son of Mars?

"That man's an arrant flirt!" exclaimed Roy, with contempt in his tone.

"Max!" came in a startled burst from the young lips.

"Well, my dear," he went on, coolly; "does it surprise you to hear that?"

"Well—I—I thought—he was an officer—and—a gentleman—and above all that sort of thing," she faltered.

"My dear child," with a light laugh that grated terribly on her strained ears, "there are hundreds and hundreds of men who are officers and gentlemen, and yet not at all above carrying on a simultaneous flirtation with half-a-dozen different girls, and end by breaking at least one heart out of the bunch."

"Surely, Mr. Derringer would not do that!" she said, indignantly.

"I am not so sure," replied Max, tranquilly. "I daresay he's an *ennuyer*, like most of his class, and ready for any distraction, especially that of a fresh and pretty face; and while it's sport to him he forgets it is death to the poor girl he makes a fool of."

"I don't believe he is capable of such conduct," returned Maysie, with a serious firmness, totally unlike her usual careless gaiety.

"Don't you?" and, struck by her tone, for the first time her lover's eyes sought her face inquiringly, and something in its look and pallor gave him a twinge of fear.

Did she care for this worthless flirt? Had he bewitched her with his shameless flatteries and barefaced sophistries?

He trembled at the mere thought; such a beautiful vista of probable and future misery loomed before him. He had only a half promise from her, nothing binding, and if this *blond* guardsman chose to come between him and this girl he loved, what could he do? How could he save her and himself?

He knew as yet that she did not love him as he wished to be loved—as, in a word, he loved her—but he had hoped in time it would come,

and now there was this new, unforeseen danger.

Derringer was so gay, witty, brilliant, what wonder women fancied him; and Maysie was unsophisticated, had seen nothing of the great world, and would fall an easy victim.

What could he do? What could he do? Something of the misery he felt shone in his honest eyes, for she said, abruptly, just as Derringer came whirling towards them,—

"Shall we go on?" and Max, clasping her once more to his breast, swung her away, wishing he could take her there and then to some distant part of the world, where never again would this man's eyes light on Maysie, nor hers on him. That was not possible, of course, but he made the most of the fleeting minutes that were his to do pretty well what he pleased with, and took her to the dim recesses of the beautiful conservatory, and exerted himself to please and amuse his companion.

His efforts, somehow or the other, fell rather flat. She was absent and depressed; answered him with monosyllables, and the moment the band struck up a fresh waltz and the strains penetrated to their retreat, rose abruptly, and going towards the door leading to the hall, said nervously,—

"I am engaged for this."

"Won't you wait for your partner to come and find you?" he asked, in surprise.

"No; it is cold here," and she shivered slightly, and then as Max offered his arm she tripped awkwardly, tearing her dress.

"I must go upstairs and get this mended," she said, pausing at the foot of the staircase. "If Mr. Derringer asks where I am please say that I shall not be able to dance this waltz," and then she ran lightly and swiftly up, and Max watched the white figure till it disappeared with loving eyes, and a new sense of wretchedness and misery at his heart.

Meanwhile, Derringer was searching everywhere for his partner, with an eager, feverish haste. He did not wish to miss a single turn. She danced divinely, and was out and away the prettiest girl in the room—the belle of the ball—a credit to any fellow to be seen often with her, and on good terms.

Where was she? Not in the conservatory; he had hunted it through thoroughly, disturbing several spooney couples as he did so, and earning anything but their blessings. Not in the library; that was tenanted by three or four old fogies intent on whist. Not in the boudoir; Jacky Pilkington had retired there with a fox-hunting, port-drinking, sports-loving squire, at whom she was industriously setting her cap. Not in the dancing-room, for he eagerly scrutinised each couple as they revolved past, and then skirted round the corners until he came to a dead stop before Blanche and Ben, resting arm-in-arm, after their exertions, at the shrine of terpsichore.

"Where's your sister, Hartrey?" he asked.

"I am sure I don't know," said Ben, groffly.

"This is my dance, and I can't find her anywhere. When did you see her last?"

"Haven't seen her for some time."

"Then you can't tell me where she is?"

This was said as though he thought the young fellow would conceal her whereabouts if he could.

"No, I can't tell you where she is. I'm not her keeper!" he responded, testily.

"The last time I saw her she was going to the conservatory with my brother," put in Blanche, quickly, fearing a row between the two men, for Ben looked sulky as a bear, and Derringer's dark eyes snapped fire at the snub.

"If you can find him he will probably be able to tell you where she is."

"Thanks. I'll go and look for him," he said, retiring hastily, not wishing to quarrel with Maysie's brother, and understanding the reason of his abrupt manner to him.

"How I hate that fellow!" snarled Hartrey.

"You seem to, dear boy," agreed Miss Roy, calmly, "and you certainly show it plainly."

"I mean to show it. I want to give him the cold shoulder, only he's one of those confoundingly thick-headed brutes who won't see a snub."

"Won't take it, you mean," cried Blanche. "He saw it, for his eyes literally blazed, but it doesn't suit him just at present to notice your extremely cordial and friendly manner."

"Of course not. He won't see it until he has grown tired of Maysie, then he'll be quick enough at taking an affront."

"Perhaps he won't tire of her," remarked his companion demurely.

"Not tire of her!" exclaimed the young fellow angrily. "Why, he'll grow weary of anything in the shape of a woman."

"I am not so sure," unconsciously repeating her brother's words. "She is very sweet, and fresh and lovable, and he has been here some time now, and has not paid much if any attention to other women. He may really love at last."

"Oh, rubbish, Blanche! How can a sensible girl like you be so foolish!" and Ben, being extremely disgusted, commenced dancing again with great vigour and energy, and Derringer pursuing his search found Max standing like a statue at the foot of the stairs, opening and shutting a fan rapidly, yet, withal, in an absent manner.

"Excuse my addressing you," began the cavalry man, for he did not know his rival personally, "but your sister told me she thought you could tell me where Miss Hartrey is?"

"Miss Hartrey has torn her dress, and has gone to get it repaired. She asked me to tell you, if you asked for her, that she would be unable to dance this with you."

Max spoke in a cold, precise tone, that sounded strange and formal even to his own ears, and the two men stood for a full moment facing each other, looking into each other's eyes, with a deadly glance of hatred; then Paul, bowing slightly, said "Thank you," and moved away, and Roy began once more to furl and unfurl the beautiful white feathers which he had given Maysie, and in such an ungente fashion, that the delicate sticks threatened to break every moment.

It was late in the evening, when Derringer had his second chance of dancing with Maysie, and this time he had no difficulty in finding her. She was sitting near Blanche, in a conspicuous part of the room, and rose at once when he offered his arm.

"Miss Hartrey, you ought to strike at least three names out of your programme, and let me put my name down instead!" he said, smiling down at her, and pressing her hand close to his side.

"Why?" she asked, raising her starlike eyes to his, then dropping them suddenly as she encountered the ardent gaze of his.

"Because you did me out of my first valise."

"I—I—could—not—help—it," she stammered, "my dress was torn."

"Yes, and it took an uncommonly long time to mend. It was unkind of you, most cruel, to disappoint me!"

"I really could not help it," she reiterated.

"Now had it been Roy," he went on coolly, "you would have had two tacks given to your furbelows, and have flown down to him swiftly on the wings—of—love."

"I am sure I should not!" she cried, hastily. "It would have been all the same, no matter who I was engaged to!"

"Then isn't he—a great deal to you—Maysie?"

"He is an old friend of my brother's, and, consequently, of mine," she returned evasively, and hating herself for not boldly avowing that he was more than that to her, at any rate.

"Nothing more?" queried the importunate Paul.

"Nothing more," she murmured, adding to herself, "at present."

"Then come into the conservatory, and promise to sit out the next dance with me, no

matter who comes to claim you," and constraining her silence into a consent, he led her to a luxurious seat behind a wide-spreading palm, and did his best to improve the golden opportunity and weaken Roy's chance.

"You will come into supper with me?" he asked, after awhile.

"I am so sorry; I can't. I am engaged," she replied.

"To whom?"

"Mr. Roy," very faintly.

"Oh, your old friend!" with sarcastic emphasis on the word. "Can't you throw him over?"

"No."

"Do!"

"Ben would be angry."

"Never mind Ben; give me the pleasure this once of taking you in. I am going back to town ere long."

The girl wavered and hesitated, and as she did so Paul bent towards her, for they had risen, and were standing facing each other, and just at that moment Max came in to claim his supper partner and stood rooted to the spot, for in that dim light it seemed to him that Derringer's lips were on her brow, and that she did not shrink from his bold caress; and with a sick feeling of utter misery at his heart the young man turned away, and, after all, Paul Derringer took Maysie in to supper, for she thought Max had forgotten her; and he was so witty, and genial, and brilliant that he made up for her coldness and abstraction.

The next afternoon, as usual, he presented himself at the farm; but, to his annoyance, found Maysie surrounded by Blanche, and Max, and Ben, and could not get a word alone with her; moreover, no one was cordial to him. Indeed, Hartrey was so rough and short, and snubbed in such an unmistakable way, at last was so uncivil that the other took the hint and kept away, trusting to chance to give him an opportunity of seeing Maysie.

A week passed before he did. The weather had changed, the bright cheery sunshine gave place to dark clouds and storms of rain, that fell unceasingly, making the river rough and turbulent, and run rapid as a mill-stream.

She could not get out. But at last a morning came when the rain ceased, or only fell at intervals, and then a letter was brought to her by one of the grooms from Kerwin Hall. It was from Derringer, begging her to meet him that afternoon by the river-side, near the stepping-stones, as he was leaving for town.

The girl sent no answer to this letter; but when the hour fixed on for the meeting drew nigh she put on her broad-brimmed, shady hat and set out for the rendezvous—not blithely, but with slow steps, and down-drooped head.

She reached the river first, and stood under a copper-beech, straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of the figure that she knew would come from the other side, across the stepping-stones.

In her perturbation of mind she did not notice how swollen the river was, how it swirled by, and that many of the stones were covered by the rushing waters; she only thought that this fascinating, handsome friend of Lord George's was going back to London, and that she would see him no more. She was so absorbed by her thoughts that she did not see Max Roy coming along from Shelton, and started with surprise when he exclaimed,—

"Maysie!"

"Child, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered, a feeling of annoyance stealing over her at his inopportune arrival.

"Then will you walk on with me?" he asked, gently. "I am going to see Ben?"

"I don't want to go back yet," she answered, irritably.

"I will wait as long as you wish," he responded.

"Hadn't you better go on if you wish to

see Ben?" she suggested. "He was at home when I left."

"Maysie, you want to get rid of me," he said, reproachfully.

"No—only—only—" she stammered.

"What is it, child?" bending down to look into her eyes. "Why do you avoid me? Oh! Maysie, those cruel rumours I have heard are not true, surely? You do not mean to give me up for that man Lord George has brought here?"

"You have no right," she began, proudly, and then her eyes fell on the Milprene on the third finger of her left hand, and she stopped suddenly. This man at her side was the one whom she had promised to try and love, who was almost her affianced husband.

"Have you forgotten—have you taken back the right you gave me?" he asked, sorrowfully, looking at her wistfully.

"No, oh, no!" she commenced, hurriedly, and then raising her eyes she gave an exclamation of fear.

Max followed their direction, and muttered,—

"Fool, he will be in the river in a minute!" for there, leaping unsteadily from one submerged stone to another, was Paul Derringer.

"Ah, save him, save him!" she shrieked, wildly, as, missing his footing, he fell into the turbulent river.

"Ah, Heaven! is he so much to you?" groaned Max, as he flung off his coat and plunged in after his rival into the seething waters that were tearing down over rocks and broken trees towards the weir.

Maysie watched with straining eyes and wildly-beating heart. Derringer seemed quite helpless, and was being tossed hither and thither, but Max was swimming powerfully towards him. A few strokes more he had seized him, and then turning with great difficulty, began to breast the stream; slowly he came towards the bank, sometimes submerged with his burden, avoiding with great difficulty the debris that was being washed down the river.

"What is it?" cried Lord George, who rode up at that minute, and sprang from his horse.

"Save them, or they will both die!" said Maysie, in a hoarse whisper, pointing to where Max, clinging to the trunk of a great tree that was formed into the bank, seemed unable to proceed further or help himself, or the man on his arm.

In a moment Lord George took in the situation, and creeping carefully along the tree trunk he lay down, and managed, with great difficulty, to drag Derringer up on it.

"Hold on, Roy!" he called out, for he noticed the young lawyer looked deathly pale, and that there was an ugly cut over his eye. "I shall be back to help you in a few moments!"

With care, and much trouble, he managed to get his friend to the bank, and leaving him there got back as quickly as he could, but just as he reached the end of the trunk a large branch of the tree became detached, and sweeping down, struck Roy on the head, causing him instantly to loose his hold and sink.

Lord George plunged in after him, and a few strokes brought him to his side. Grasping the drowning man firmly, he struck out for the bank, and, being near, succeeded, after a short, but terribly sharp struggle, to reach it.

Maysie was kneeling by the brink, and her strong, young hands helped to drag Max from the river, and she took his poor, battered, bloodstained head on her lap, while Lord George shook himself like a Newfoundland, and gazed sorrowfully at the deathly face.

"Is he much hurt?" she asked, in an awestricken whisper, giving never a glance at the half-unconscious Derringer, who lay full length on the grass, hardly knowing whether he was on earth, or in Heaven, or anywhere else.

"Fatally, I fear," answered the brave young fellow, who had just twice risked his life.

"Oh, Max! Max!" she sobbed.

Now, too late, the veil was torn from before her eyes and face to face with death she knew this was the man she loved with all the depth and strength of her tender nature.

"My love! my love! do not leave me!" she implored, raising his face to her breast; and at the impassioned word the heavy lids lifted, and as she looked into the wistful, misty, blue eyes, she whispered: "Max, I love you!"

One moment they gazed up at her, and then they closed for ever, and he died content in her loving embrace.

The legend of the Milprene came true; she had lost a love as strong and devoted as ever woman won.

A year later, Lord George sat in his smoking-room waiting for the return of Paul Derringer, who had gone to Stretton's Farm to plead for Maysie's love, to ask her to be his wife.

"Well?" he said, as Paul entered, one glance at his gloomy face being enough. "She has refused you?"

"Yes."

"I thought she would!"

"And you are glad?" said the other, bitterly. "You think you will have a chance now yourself!"

"I hope so," he answered, quietly, a feeling of great gladness at his heart, for his love for Maysie was only second to that Max had borne her.

And at the homestead, Blanche and her husband Ben were rejoicing that Derringer had been sent away, a discomfited wooer, and that the breaking-off of his engagement to gentle Lady Grace, which nearly broke her heart, had been useless.

They knew Maysie would not think of love or marriage for a long, long while, because, like Queen Iselt:

"All her soul was as the breaking sea,
And all her heart unhungered as the wind."

But they hoped in the years to come that Lord George's quiet, unobtrusive devotion might gain its reward, and that she might marry him, when she has forgotten, as far as she can forget, her girlhood's lover, honest, faithful Max Roy!

[THE END.]

THE BRIDE'S MISTAKE.

"On, Harry, how beautiful this is!" cried Sophie Garland, clasping her plump little hands with delight. "I never dreamed that you had prepared such a home as this for me!"

"Love in a cottage, eh?" said Harry Garland, looking down with eyes of amused admiration at his pretty young bride. "But you see, Sophie, I thought this would be much nicer than London lodgings! For the summer months, at least!"

Cloverdale was the prettiest of Gothic cottages, all embowered in blooming lilacs, fragrant tresses of honeysuckle and climbing roses. There was a little lawn shorn close as green plush, a running brook bridged over with cedar-nailed planks, and the smallest of grottoes, where the drip of a cascade was lost among ferns and irises!

"It's just charming!" said Mrs. Garland, who had filled both hands with tulips, daffodils, and early roses. "I never dreamed of anything so lovely! And there is a cabinet piano in the drawing-room, and real stained glass windows in the library, and the quaintest sun-dial I ever saw!"

"And plenty of spare rooms if my mother should wish to spend the summer with us," said Mr. Garland, carelessly.

Sophie's face fell, all of a sudden. The roses and daffodils drifted to the ground; she came close to Harry, and began nervously playing with the middle button of his coat.

Harry, she said, "I don't want to seem

ungracious, but—but perhaps it is best to have an understanding on this question at once."

"On what question?" said Harry, somewhat bewildered.

"On the mother-in-law question," courageously answered Sophie.

Harry burst out laughing.

"My dear child," said he, "who has been filling your innocent little head with nonsense?"

"It isn't nonsense," said Sophie. "But I have made up my mind never to let our domestic peace be imperilled by such an element as this. And I—I can't consent to receive your mother here, Harry."

Mr. Garland whistled low and long.

"The dence you can't!" said he.

"You won't ask it, will you, dear?" coaxed the young wife, in her sweetest accents.

"If you only knew my mother, Sophie—" he began.

"But I don't know her," pleaded Sophie, "and I don't want to know her."

"I'm sure you would like her, Sophie—and I am positively certain you could not help loving her."

"As if there ever could be any relationship nearer than armed neutrality between mother and daughter in-law," satirically observed Mrs. Garland. "No, Harry, it is too dangerous an experiment to try. You will let me have my own way in this matter, will you not?" she added, caressingly. "It is the first favour I have asked of you."

"Of course you are the mistress here," said Garland, feigning an indifference that he did not feel. "I do not intend to oppose your wishes in any respect."

And Sophie stood on tiptoe to kiss him, by way of reward.

After this discussion it is hardly necessary to say that Mrs. Henry Garland was no little surprised, two or three days subsequently, by the arrival of a hansom cab at the gate, loaded down with trunks, and the appearance of a juvenile-looking elderly lady, very much powdered and frizzled, with an eighteen-year-old bonnet and a parasol which a school girl might have envied. Sophie started from the cosy nest in the garden where she was reading Dante.

"Mamma!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, darling, it's me," said Mrs. Percy, her mother. "I was on my way to Scarborough; so I thought I would surprise you and dear Harold."

And she gave Sophie a succession of kisses, which were very strongly flavoured with rose-powder, and beckoned the cabman to bring in the trunks.

"Four," said she. "And a bonnet-box, and an umbrella strap, and two travelling bags. I believe that is all. My darling Sophie, what a lovely home you have here. And the doctor says country air is the very thing I need to set me up."

Mrs. Peregrine Percy was one of those old young ladies who remind one forcibly of an antique piece of furniture varnished up to look like new.

Sophie Garland had never been in sympathy with her fashionable mother. She had married decidedly in opposition to that lady's wishes, and was, to tell the truth, not especially pleased at her appearance on the scene at this particular moment.

"But what am I to do?" she said to herself. "I certainly can't turn out of doors; though I'm sure I don't know what Harry will say, after all those disagreeable things I said about his mother."

But Harry Garland was too much of a gentleman not to behave like a Sir Launcelot under any circumstances. He welcomed Mrs. Percy with genuine hospitality, and did not even notice Sophie's appealing glances when the old lady incidentally let fall the information that, since she liked the situation of Cloverdale Cottage so well, she should, perhaps, remain there all the summer, "just to keep Sophie company, you know."

"It is so good of Harry not to fling back

my own silly words into my face," she thought, with a thrill of gratitude.

But at the end of a week Mrs. Peregrine Percy sickened.

"I hope it's not going to be anything serious," said she. "Sickness does a person so. I never had any wrinkles, you know, dear, before that last attack of neuralgia."

But when it transpired that Mrs. Percy's ailment was the severe and contagious form of disease known as "typhus fever," there was a general commotion at Cloverdale Cottage. The servants gave warning; the neighbours kept away; and poor Sophie was weary, worn out with nursing and fatigue, when one day a gentle little woman in black presented herself.

"She will see you, ma'am, said the little charity girl," who alone could be induced to cross the infected threshold, and who loudly declared that "at the asylum she had had everything, and wasn't afraid of nothing!"

"I told her to go away, but it was no good."

Sophie, pale and haggard, crept down into the darkened drawing-room.

"I don't know who you are," said she, "or what your business is, but you had better go away. There is terrible sickness here."

"I know it," answered a mild voice, "and that is the very reason that I am here. I am Harry's mother, darling. I have come to help you."

So, like a ministering angel, the "mother-in-law" came into the house, just as Sophie herself succumbed to the fell disease.

No sooner did Mrs. Peregrine Percy recover than she packed her trunks, and made off for Scarborough as fast as possible.

"One always needs change after illness," said she. "And the atmosphere of a sick-room always was most depressing for me. I daresay that that good Mrs. Garland will do all that is necessary for dear Sophie; and I have my own welfare to think of!"

Sophie, just able to sit up in a pillowed arm-chair, her cheeks hollowed by illness, her large eyes shining from deep, purple circles, looked after the departing carriage, and then lifted her glance to the tender nurse who sat beside her.

"Mother," she said, wistfully, "you will not leave me?"

"Not unless you send me away, Sophie," said Mrs. Garland, tenderly.

"And that will be never," said Sophie, closing her eyes with a sigh of relief. "How angel-good you have been to me! Without you I should surely have died."

And even in her slumber she could not rest peacefully unless she held Mrs. Garland's hand in hers.

That evening, when Harry came home, she opened her heart to him.

"Harry," she said, "can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you, dearest?"

"For what I said about our dear, dear mother," fervently uttered Sophie. "She is precious beyond expression to me now. She has saved my life by her courage and devotion. And I feel that I cannot part with her any more. Would she stay here with us always, do you think, Harry?"

He smiled gravely.

"I am her only son, Sophie," said he. "Yes, I think she will—if you ask her."

Sophie made her confession to her mother-in-law at once.

"I was so rude, so selfish," she candidly acknowledged. "But I did not know you then."

And Mrs. Garland's tender kiss was a seal of the most loving forgiveness.

Mrs. Peregrine Percy never has gone back to Cloverdale Cottage.

"I don't fancy that stupid, monotonous life," said she. "And my poor child is given up, soul and body, into the clutches of a mother-in-law! It wasn't for want of warning either. I told Sophie just how it would be, but she never would take my advice."

A. R.

FACETIÆ.

A FRONTSPIECE—the hotel clerk.

TAKES come high, but we must have them.

A QUESTION for newsboys: Does your mother know your route?

GENTLEMEN learning the cornet should employ private tooters.

THE defendant in a murder case often hangs upon the judge's words.

THE tonsorial artist who colours whiskers get so much per dye 'em.

ALL men are not homeless, but some men are home less than others.

A FASHION article speaks of "a novel colour." We thought novels were generally read.

A WOMAN's heart is like the moon—is always changing, and there is always a man in it.

It's a great thing to have an indulgent husband, provided he doesn't indulge too frequently.

HARDLY a week passes but we are reminded that we are constantly surrounded by perils seen and kerosene.

To bashful correspondent: The first thing for you to do is to pop the question; the second to question the pop.

He was fond of singing revival hymns, and his wife named the baby Fort, so that he would want to hold it.

"You are not expected to eat the enamel," said the waiter to the man endeavouring to get the last drop of soup.

"Is your father a man of sedentary habits?" "Sedentary? Well, I rather think he is. He sits on me every time he sees me!"

It is said that whisky is being made from old rags. Any clothes observer will remember instances where whisky has made rags.

Two months hence the signal service will predict: "Spring followed by summer." And the prediction will probably be verified.

HE: "My income is small, and perhaps it is cruel of me to take you from your father's roof." SHE: "I don't live on the roof!"

"Oh, Maud, what do you think? My canary bird has laid an egg!" "That ain't nothin' much! My pa laid two stair carpets yesterday!"

AFTER CHURCH.—Spoggs: "Was it not disgraceful, the way in which Smigga snored in church to day?" Stiggs: "I should think it was. Why, he woke us all up."

FOND WIFE: "Would you believe that Mrs. Eccles, next door, speaks seven languages?" FOND HUSBAND: "Certainly I would. She's got tongue enough to speak fifty!"

PATIENT: "That's a big bill you sent, doctor. You only looked at my tongue and prescribed quinine." DOCTOR: "You forget, my dear sir, that I also felt your pulse."

THE burglar who drugged a doctor and then ransacked the house should be arrested for practising medicine without a license.

"THESE are hard times," said the young debt collector. "Every place I went to-day I was requested to call again but one, and that was when I dropped in to see my girl."

A FASHIONABLE authority says a genteel carver always sits when he carves. This is probably true, and it is also true that he frequently takes the roast goose into his lap.

A TIRING PERFORMANCE.—De Faggs: "A fine audience this? Why, a dog-fight would draw a bigger crowd." Gagley (wearily): "Yess; but a dog-fight only tires the dogs, you know."

TWO CHEAP COSTUMES.—Perkins: "And so you're going to the fancy dress ball? What costume are you going to wear?" Smart Alec: "I think I'll borrow your summer suit and go as a tramp. What are you going to wear?" Perkins: "I guess I'll put on your diagonal Prince Albert and go as a looking-glass."

HE: "I declare, Miss Angelina, you treat me worse than your dog!" SHE: "Oh, Mr. de Moggys, how can you say so? I'm sure I never make the slightest difference between you!"

MISS HAZELEYES (to absent-minded but enamoured Mr. Mallow): "Come, Mr. Mallow, won't you join us and take a hand?" Mr. Mallow: "Ah—er—thanks awfully. I will accept yours."

MAGISTRATE (sternly): "Why did you attempt to escape? Don't you know that the way of the transgressor is hard?" Culprit: "That's just why I tried to get out of the way, your honour."

LADY: "That ivory ornament you sold me was not ivory, but celluloid. When it came near a gas-jet it blew up." Dealer: "Maybe the trunk came from a circus elephant. Some of 'em are hard drinkers."

"WHAT do you think of my week-old whiskers?" he asked, proudly, as he coaxed them gently to stay in sight. "They look like weak, old whiskers," she answered, with a cruel intonation of scorn.

A BAD DAY FOR DOGS.—First City Sportsman: "Just back from a hunting trip, I see. Get any game?" Second City Sportsman (who did considerable unintentional killing): "No, I had to come home; ran out of dogs."

GUEST (to hotel clerk): "I've met that gentleman who just went out before somewhere. His face is very familiar, but to save my life I can't call his name." Clerk: "His name is Smith; he is one of the officials at Wandsworth prison. Your bill is two pounds, sir."

"Is it now considered ill-bred to take the last biscuit off the plate?" queried Richelieu of Waggle. "Well, no; but it is decidedly unwise." "Unwise?" "Yes; always wait a minute, and they'll bring on some hot ones."

A TRUE SIGN OF DEATH.—"Are you superstitious?" "Not very. Why?" "Do you believe that it is a sign of death when a dog howls under your window at night?" "Yes, if I can find my gun before the dog gets away."

CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.—A small boy of our acquaintance admires his clergyman. He says: "I would like to be a minister, if I could be a nice minister like him. If I can't be that, I should like to be a tramcar conductor."

THE LATEST INVENTION.—Infuriated Citizen (to organ grinder): "I say, Garibaldi, move on with that measly music. My wife is sick." Organ Grinder (grinding away): "St signor, droppa penny een ze slota and hear it stoppa playing."

IN an advertisement by a railway company of some uncalled-for goods, the letter "l" had dropped from the word "lawful," and it read: "People to whom these packages are directed are requested to come forward and pay the awful charges on the same."

"AND so you think you will get married when you grow up to be a young lady, Flossie?" said the caller. "Oh, I haven't a doubt of it," assented Flossie. "Everybody says I am very much like my mamma, and she, you know, has been married three times."

"How would you like some brandied peaches of my own make?" asked a benevolent old lady of a tramp. "I don't want to put you to so much trouble, mum," replied the hardened vagabond. "You needn't mind the peaches; a little of the brandy will suit me."

A MAN named Marrow was recently with a friend; meeting some of the newspaper men. When Colonel Mussey came up the friend remarked: "Colonel Mussey, let me present my friend, Mr. Marrow." "Ah, Mr. Marrow," said the colonel, "glad to meet you. Are you related to the Bonapartes?" "Not that I know of," responded the gentleman, innocently, and the colonel took his little joke out in the back yard and broke it open with an axe.

WIFE: "I found an egg in the coal-bin this morning. That's a queer place for a hen to lay in." Husband: "Just the place, my dear just the place." W.: "Just the place?" H.: "Why, certainly. If our hens begin to lay in coal for us, we won't need to mind how the price goes up."

A VERDICT NOT REACHED.—Judge (to Jury): "Have you agreed upon a verdict? Is the prisoner guilty or not guilty of the crime charged in the indictment?" Foreman: "We have not yet reached a verdict, your honour. I missed my pocket-book in the night, and I would respectfully ask that each juror be searched."

Pretty School-teacher: "James, is 'to hiss' an active or passive verb?" James (oldest boy in the class): "Both." Pretty School-teacher: "How is that, James?" James: "Active on the part of the feller, and passive on the part of the girl." Pretty School-teacher blushes, and marks James "perfect" in grammar.

DOCTOR, I am afflicted with soreness of throat, which is a great annoyance to me. I sing in the choir, you know." "Yes, I hear you every Sunday." "Could you not tell me what I can do that will effect a satisfactory cure?" "Certainly. I can recommend a cure that will be satisfactory to all concerned." "What's that?" "Quit singing."

AN old Scotchwoman, very fond of gossip and a dram, was induced to sign the temperance pledge. Calling upon a friend one day the bottle was produced, and a glass handed to her. "Na, na, Mrs. Mitchell," said the gossip. "I have signed the pledge ne'er to touch nor handle a glass again; but, if ye'll put a wee drap in a cup, I'll tak' it."

"ARE all arrangements for the banquet made?" "Very nearly. But we haven't selected a man to respond to the third toast yet." "Snipeworthy would be a good man." "Snipeworthy? Why, he can't make a speech! Whenever he tries it, he breaks down in the first sentence, and subsides." "Well, that is the reason why I suggested his name. He's the kind of a speaker to have at a banquet."

A NEW VERSION OF AN OLD THEME.—Near-sighted Artist: "B'Jove, there's a glorious subject, just wait till I sketch it—a beautiful amber and gold sunset with a white cloud slowly moving to the right. If I could get that on canvas as it should be, it would be worth a fortune." Farmer's Boy: "What yer talkin' about? That's my red-headed sister settin' over there on a rock and the cloud is the old white horse a eatin' grass."

An amusing incident illustrative of absent-mindedness is narrated of the last session of the German Reichstag. Herr Wichmann was calling the roll of members, when, upon reading out his own name, he naturally received no response. In a louder tone he called the name a second time, and finally roared it out like a healthy-lunged bull. But at this juncture the laughter of his colleagues showed there must be something wrong, and, realising the ludicrous situation, he joined the hilarity and marked himself present.

REDUCING THE SURPLUS.—"Great Jerusalem, wife, this package of notes is £50 short," said an opulent politician, in hair-raising accents, the other morning. "Don't get excited, my dear; that's all right. I took it to buy Julia a sealskin jacket," replied his wife, serenely. "The deuce you did! and without saying a word to me. What do you mean?" "I am living up to your political faith, my dear. I heard you tell a political friend last week, in tones that shook the rafters, that a surplus in the treasury was an outrage, a curse, and a temptation to reckless extravagance, and that it should be reduced at all hazards. Now, I don't propose to have our domestic peace blasted by a plethora of treasury, so I went to your safe yesterday and reduced the surplus to the extent of £50. Wasn't it a wise political policy?"

SOCIETY.

PRINCESS BEATRICE has promised to visit Greenwich on June 25th to lay the foundation-stone of new buildings to be added to the Greenwich Jubilee Almshouses as a memorial of Her Majesty's Jubilee. These almshouses were erected in 1809 to celebrate the Jubilee of George III., and the older portions are in some places to be rebuilt.

The wedding of Prince Oscar of Sweden and Miss Ebba Munck took place at St. Stephen's Church Bournemouth, on the 15th March. A portion of the church was, by consent of the Royal party, set apart for members of the congregation of St. Stephen's, admission being by ticket.

The jewels of Lady Dudley, which his Highness Maharajah Holkar purchased in England for £21,500 it is announced have arrived at Indore. The most precious jewels Lady Dudley would not part with, and the Maharajah has been able to secure only the next best, and not the best and first-class jewels in her possession.

The Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Denmark recently gave a grand ball at their Palace of Amalienborg. The King and Queen of Denmark, Prince and Princess Waldemar of Denmark, Prince Vilhelm, and Prince Hans were present, and as many guests as the space would allow. The guests began to arrive at about nine o'clock, and passing up the grand staircase, which was decorated with azaleas and hyacinths, were received by Countess Bebel, Lady in Waiting to the Crown Princess, General Nagler, Master of Ceremonies, and Captain Bull, Adjutant to Crown Prince. At a quarter to ten the King and Queen of Denmark, Prince and Princess Waldemar, Prince Vilhelm, and Prince Hans arrived, and were received by the Crown Prince and Crown Princess. Dancing began in the Knights Hall, which was well lighted. The Queen of Denmark took her seat on a dais covered with red satin, with Princess Waldemar on one and Madame Estrup, the wife of the Danish Prime Minister, on the other side. Prince Waldemar opened the ball with the Crown Princess of Denmark. Dancing continued till, at twelve o'clock, supper was announced. The King took in the Crown Princess, the Crown Prince took in the Queen of Denmark. Supper was served in all the apartments of the ground floor, the arrangements were perfect, and the table decorations were exceedingly pretty. After supper, dancing was resumed with "La Tempête," after which came the cotillon with some very pretty figures. There were many large baskets with beautiful bouquets, the baskets being draped with red velvet, ornamented with gold crowns and fringe. Carriages were ordered for a quarter past two; but the dancing was so animated that it was quite an hour later before the ball was brought to a close. Coffee and bouillon was then served, and the Crown Prince and Crown Princess withdrew. The King of Denmark did not join in the dancing, but played a game of whist, Count Toll, the Russian Ambassador, Baron Rosenörn-Lehn, the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Herr Scavenius, the Danish Church Minister, playing with His Majesty. The Queen wore a claret-coloured satin robe, with front of flowering silk brocade, and trimmed with red fringe; the bodice was ornamented with diamonds arranged between dark red flowers; Her Majesty's jewels were diamonds. The Crown Princess of Denmark wore a robe of apricot-coloured plush with a long train; the front was of pale red silk brocade, trimmed with lace, and bordered with fur; the bodice was ornamented with pear-shaped pearls, and Her Royal Highness wore a remarkably handsome necklace of diamonds. Princess Waldemar was in a greenish blue moiré antique gown, trimmed with gold lace; her jewels were rubies.

STATISTICS.

The newspapers published in the United Kingdom now number 2177, daily and weekly. Of these London claims 454, while 1273 come out in the English provinces. Scotland publishes 189, Ireland 158, Wales 82, and the Islands 21. Further, the magazines and reviews amount to 1508, of which 399 have distinctly religious tendencies.

IMPORTS OF BUTTER.—From some figures recently published it appears that during February we imported 130,005cwt. of butter, against 127,091cwt. in the same month of last year, Sweden supplying 16,416cwt., against 13,635cwt.; Denmark, 47,018cwt., against 42,053cwt.; Germany, 15,584cwt., against 16,498cwt.; and France, 30,027cwt., against 36,678cwt. The quantity of margarine imported during the month from Holland alone was 89,499cwt., against 92,244cwt., out of a total of 96,849cwt., against 96,198cwt. The imports of cheese, including 21,101cwt. from Holland, against 23,344cwt., and 68,292cwt. from the United States, against 41,136cwt., were 97,738cwt., against 75,178cwt. Reckoned in great hundreds, our imports of eggs came to 371,735 against 642,359, the following figures, given also in great hundreds, showing the principal sources of supply: France, 145,719, against 238,706; Belgium, 93,016, against 170,188; Germany, 81,212, against 188,982; and Denmark, 23,047, against 35,032.

GEMS.

It is never too late to mend broken resolutions.

Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready, and writing an exact man.

It is with a fine genius as with a fine fashion—all those are displeased at it who are not able to follow it.

What must be shall be; and that which is a necessity to him that struggles is little more than choice to him that is willing.

SABBATHS are costly things; fling them not away. You may judge of your state pretty well by asking yourself this question: "How do I value the Sabbath day?"

A GREAT deal of discomfort arises from oversensitiveness about what people may say about you or your actions. Many unhappy persons seem to imagine that they are in an amphitheatre, with the assembled world as spectators whereas they are playing to empty benches all the while.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

APPLE PUDDING.—Three eggs, one cup each of sugar and sweet milk, one-third of a cup of melted butter, one and one-third cups of apples; flavour with lemon; bake in pastry.

EGGLESS CAKE.—One and one-half teacups of sugar, one teacup of sour milk, three teacups of flour, one and one-half teacups of butter, one teaspoonful of soda, one half teaspoonful of cinnamon, one-half teaspoonful of nutmeg, one teacup of raisins chopped and floured.

PANCKED OYSTERS.—Cut stale bread in thin slices, then round them, removing the crust, to fit patty-pans; toast them, butter, and put in the pans; moisten the slices with three or four teaspoonfuls of oyster liquor; place on the toast a layer of oysters, sprinkle with pepper, and put a small piece of butter on top; place pans in a baking-pan, cover with another pan to keep in the steam and flavour; put in a quick oven, and when cooked seven or eight minutes remove the cover and sprinkle with salt; replace the cover, and let cook one minute longer. Serve in the patty-pans.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE DOG DECIDED IT.—An English Solomon presided at a trial to determine the ownership of a dog. He couldn't make out from the evidence which claimant was the real owner, so he made one stand on each side, while an officer held a dog in the middle of the room. Then he told them both to whistle and the officer to release the dog at the same moment. When this was done the dog bolted through the open door. "Call the next case," was all the comment the judge made, although the litigants stormed.

THE STRICT RULES OF ROYAL MARRIAGES are certainly being relaxed. After the Swedish Royal romance, the younger members of the Russian Imperial family are now to be allowed a free choice of brides and bridegrooms in an inferior station to their own. The Czar has commanded that the laws concerning Russian Royal alliances shall be remodelled, with the result that the younger branches of the Imperial House will be permitted to contract morganatic unions on renouncing certain privileges, and part of their income.

CANADA.—The name of Canada, according to Sir John Barrow, originated in the following circumstances: When the Portuguese, under Gaspar Cortereal, in the year 1500, first ascended the great River St. Lawrence, they believed it was the strait of which they were in search, and through which a passage might be discovered into the Indian Sea. But on arriving at the point whence they could clearly ascertain it was not a strait but a river, they, with all the emphasis of disappointed hopes, exclaimed repeatedly, "Canada!" (here nothing), words which were remembered and repeated by the natives on seeing Europeans arrive in 1534, who naturally conjectured that the word they heard employed so often must denote the name of the country.

AN ELABORATE CULINARY EXHIBITION is now open in Paris—the annual display of French *charcuterie*. Hams, tongues, galantines of every description, brawn, and numerous tasty concoctions of pork, veal, and jelly, game compounds, pasties, &c., appear in curious shapes, and loaded with ornaments in wax or lard. There are models of the old Bastille in brawn, a shape of savoury jelly representing the Trocadero, elegant lard vases supporting tempting pasties, bouquets of flowers formed out of fat; but the gold medal is carried off by a centre-piece executed by a young *charcutier* of twenty. He represents a perfect landscape in lard, including a hunting scene—horses, dogs, and hunters complete; a flock of sheep, browsing peacefully; and then a railway train emerging from a tunnel, and drawing a cargo of delicious pies of all kinds.

HOW TO CARE FOR THE INFANT.—The following are a few items taken from a German official document, handed to every parent in certain towns upon registering the birth of a child: "Keep the room free from dust, smoke, and bad odours; don't dry washed linen in it, or cover the child's head with veil, clothes, or coverlet. The light must be somewhat softened during the first week or two, but care must be taken not to leave the room in total darkness; the night-light must not smoke or flicker, great care to be taken with petroleum lamps, not to turn them too low; temperature a little over 60 degrees Fahr. Cleanliness is the condition of health; child to be washed once a day regularly. No tight clothing, no pins; child to be carried but little, and never dandled. North and east winds to be avoided. Mattresses of horsehair or hay, and often to be changed. Very injurious to 'suck the bottle,' rags of any sort, and probably the thumb. Diet—avoid bread, potatoes, or meat. In cases of prolonged crying, sickness, or shortness of breath, promptly send for the doctor. Mark any redness of the eyelids, or the child may lose its sight for life."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BRAZIER.—We cannot give business addresses.

C. R.—Possibly she thinks he admires her or admires him.

J. R.—"Have," in the sentence quoted, should be used, as any school grammar will explain.

NATALIE.—1. Try tincture of cantharides and sweet oil. 2. Plenty of exercise and plain living. 3. Neatness and regularity.

E. A.—The chloride of cobalt is used for the purpose desired. Cobalt is much used in the arts, chiefly to make fine colours.

NESTA R.—1. Thanks for compliments. 2. Grammar and writing good. 3. Not without knowing your business qualifications.

A. N.—Cleveland's Concordance to Milton was published in 1867; Brightwell's to Tennyson in 1869; and Abbott's to Pope in 1875.

R. G.—1. No remedy that we know of. 2. Your height is above the average. 3. Daily practise will improve your handwriting.

T. T.—With your brown eyes, fair skin and brown hair you are something of a Spanish blonde. You write well—a clear, flowing style.

A. M.—The livre, the ancient French coin to which you refer, appeared as early as 810 A.D. At the French Revolution the franc was substituted for the livre.

A. A. P.—Jonathan Wild was a notorious English robber. He was executed in 1725. He was the hero of Fielding's novel, "The History of Jonathan Wild."

K. R. M.—The tokens by which characters is indicated in handwriting are too many to enumerate. You find them in the books that teach the science of graphology.

J. W. S.—We can only aid you by advising you to be regular in your habits, to take outdoor exercise daily, and to avoid the use of food containing much starch or sugar.

D. C.—You are too young to judge for yourself, and should be governed by the advice and wishes of your parents in this matter. It will be much to your credit to yield to them.

E. E. D.—The word lady occurs in Isaiah, chapter 47, verses 5 and 7; and in II. John, chapter 1, verses 1 and 5. Ladies will be found in Judges, chapter 5, verse 29; and in Esther, chapter 1, verse 18.

F. M.—We know of nothing that will remove superfluous hair from the face without some injury to the skin. Besides, if removed, it will grow again, and be thicker and coarser than before. Let it alone.

M. C. P.—The fourth wife of Henry VIII., of England, was Anne of Cleves, whom Henry wedded with reluctance, to please the Protestant party, and make friends among the Protestant German princes. He divorced her in six months.

VIOLET.—1. Yes. 2. No, it might soften it. 3. Yes. 4. Pretty good. 5. Bright brown. 6. Test it with others. 7. Try to be natural. 8. Fair writing. Too unformed to indicate character. 9. No. 10. Glycerine. 11. Lavender water. 12. A little violet powder or powdered starch.

G. H. P.—You had better trust to your parents in this matter. You are too young to judge of what is best. Do not marry at all until you are fully aware of your own true sentiments. After accepting a suitor you should not permit your fancy to be captivated by another.

M. M. C.—1. It is customary in introductions to present the youngest person to the oldest. 2. Young ladies are generally fertile in expedients. You can get rid of your unwelcome escort, we think, if you try. 3. Your handwriting is very pretty, but it is not of the right form for a copyist.

L. S. M.—Spring, in astronomy, is one of the four seasons of the year, beginning for the northern hemisphere at the time of the vernal equinox, or on March 21, and ending at the time of the summer solstice, on June 21. In the United States the Spring is regarded as including March, April, and May.

D. D. F.—The Thirty Years' War was a religious and political conflict, which involved the German Empire, and with it the principal States of Europe, from 1618 to 1648. Sir Edward Cui's "Lives of the Warriors of the Thirty Years' War," published in London in 1874, is among the most recent and interesting of the works upon the subject.

E. E. F.—The Bank of England was opened for business on Jan. 1, 1695. It immediately issued notes, none of which were, however, of smaller denomination than £50. On Feb. 27, 1797, the bank suspended specie payments, and then notes of the denomination of £1 were prepared and issued. The resumption of payment in coin took place on May 1, 1833.

J. AND B. are two charming young cousins—charming if their pictures are true—who are engaged respectively to two young men in easy circumstances, but are doubtful if they are old enough at sixteen and eighteen to marry. Jessie, being eighteen, and a notable housekeeper, might take the responsibility of marriage upon herself very properly, but it would be better if Bessie had two more years of sweet, girlish freedom—learning all she can of life, and books, and housewifery, and enjoying every innocent pleasure. The two locks of hair are seal-brown and gold-brown.

W. G.—Yes, finding nine peas in a pod has a superstition attached to it. Nine is the chief of the three mystical numbers. Five and three are the others. According to Pythagoras man is a full chord—eight notes—then comes deity. Love is the deity that comes with your ninth pea. So lay the pod on the door-sill, and the first young man who steps in is your fated cavalier—so runs the fable.

G. G. F.—The sackbut is a wind instrument of the trumpet species, capable of being drawn out to different lengths, and, perhaps, identical with the modern trombone, which is said to have been modelled by the Italians from an ancient one excavated at Pompeii, and which on its first introduction into England was called a sackbut.

E. E. C.—Col. John Stevens, in 1808, brought out the *Phoenix*, a side-wheel steamer, and in the following year he provided it with feathering paddle wheels. This steamer could not then ply on the Hudson River, as Fulton and Livingston held a monopoly of the navigation of that river, and she was taken by sea around to the Delaware River. This was the first sea voyage ever made by a steam vessel.

F. C. C.—Cracks in floors, around the mould board or other parts of a room may be neatly and permanently filled by thoroughly soaking newspapers in paste made of one pound of flour, three quarts of water, and a tablespoonful of alum thoroughly boiled and mixed. The mixture will be about as thick as putty, and may be forced into the cracks with a case-knife. It will harden like paper-mache.

F. N. F.—Albion is the appellation by which Great Britain was originally known to the Greeks and Romans. It is a Celtic word, meaning high island or mountain land, and was probably applied originally to the northern part, embracing the Scottish highlands. The root of the word is thus the same as that of the word Alps. The derivation from the Latin *albus*, white, is now rejected by the best critics.

WHY WOMEN TALK.

One curious fact, beyond dispute
Is this,—that men are often mute;
Apart from business topics they
Find little very bright to say.

The opposite we all perceive
Marks the long line which starts from Eve;
We covet what their tongues can do,
Sometimes admire, and often rue.

With woman nothing seems to balk
A fluent withery of talk;
Though proud or humble, old or young,
The muses sit upon her tongue.

Why Persians stamp so, a fable old
Of Persian stomp shall here unfold:
"When the first pair arrived on earth
The power of speech thus had its birth:

"To soothe their care, their sorrow drown,
Ten buckets of bright talk came down;
But while the man was sipping wine,
The woman took, for her part, nine!"

J. B.

L. M. M.—Oases was a name given by the ancients to the fertile spots in the Libyan Desert. It is derived from an Egyptian word, signifying inhabited places. They were supposed to be islands, rising from an ocean of sand. In the Sahara Desert upwards of thirty oases are enumerated, of which about twenty are inhabited. On the cultivated portions of oases date palms, rice, barley, wheat, &c., are cultivated.

E. E. D.—Charles Stewart Parnell, the leader of the Irish Home Rule Party in the House of Commons, was born at Avondale, in the county of Wicklow, Ireland, in 1847. His father was the son of a gentleman who was at one time High Sheriff for the County Meath, and his mother the daughter of an American, Admiral Stewart, who distinguished himself in the war of 1812. Mr. Parnell visited the United States in 1880.

A. A.—The last battle fought on English ground was the battle of Sedgemoor, July 6, 1685, and this is known as the one battle of the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion against the reigning king, James II. The duke, with an army of about 6,000 men, met the royal forces at Sedgemoor, but after a brief struggle his command was forced to give way, and Monmouth was pursued and captured, and was beheaded at Tower Hill, July 15, 1685.

W. X. X.—This disposition on the part of your betrothed to find fault is likely to seriously affect the happiness and prosperity of your married life, and you should have a serious talk with her about it. If she does not endeavour to cure herself of this fault, you had better postpone the marriage. If you are sufficiently serious you will be able to show the young lady the great danger of allowing this habit to grow upon her.

B. S. N. wishes to know which would be more profitable, to travel through the country, taking country towns en route, with tea, coffee and spice for sale, or to set up a tobacco and fruit shop in a town sixty miles or so from a sea-port. Also whether it is better to buy fruit for retailing from a wholesale dealer or from the fruit vessels in port. Fruit and tobacco are very incongruous things, but we have seen them combined in a pretty shop to advantage. Such a shop would probably pay better than the tea and coffee peddling. If possible get your fruit from a large market, as you may there have choice and be sure your fruit is tolerably fresh.

N. L. W.—A mixture of sulphur, treacle, and cream of tartar is often used for the purpose of purifying the blood, and doubtless it has a tendency to regulate the system. The proportions of this mixture are one quart of treacle, two tablespoonfuls of sulphur, and one teaspoonful of cream tartar.

E. B.—The young man, according to your description of him, seems to be weakened by vanity, and also to lack tact and common sense, or he would not boast to you of his social connections in such an offensive way. However, he may be a pretty fair specimen of humanity, notwithstanding his faults, and if you two girls politely snub him, with a due mixture of kindness and firmness, he may take the hint and stop his boasting.

J. C. H.—There is no rule or custom which requires a man who receives and refuses an offer of marriage during leap year, to give the rejected party a silk dress. Such a custom as that would be contrary to the best interests of society, inasmuch as it would be an encouragement for bold and ill-mannered women to overstep the bounds of modesty and decorum by making mercenary offers of marriage to gentlemen during leap year.

E. A.—Thane was a title much in use anciently. It sometimes signified a nobleman, sometimes a freeman, and sometimes a magistrate; but most properly an officer under the king. The Saxons had a nobility called thanes, and the Scots also. The title was abolished in England at the Conquest, upon the introduction of the feudal system. In Scotland it was abolished by King Malcolm III., when the title of earl was adopted, 1057.

MARA asks "Is the tomato a fruit or a vegetable?" All plants are vegetables in one sense. In the capacity as an esculent the tomato may more properly be called a fruit. It was originally named the love-apple. It belongs to the order of Solanaceae. Mara wishes also to know about complexion and development, that topic of universal feminine interest. Keep your complexion from exposure, bathe in soft water mixed with sour milk or lemon acid. To make flesh eat farinaceous food—bread, potatoes, rice, oatmeal, and drink warm milk.

F. D.—The English soldier who married Oliver Cromwell's eldest daughter, Bridget, was Henry Ireton. He had commenced reading for the law, but the civil war broke out, and he joined the Parliamentary army. At the battle of Naseby he was taken prisoner, but escaped. Cromwell made him Lord-Deputy of Ireland. He died of the plague, and his body was buried in Westminster Abbey, but on the restoration his remains were exhumed, exposed on a gibbet, and burned by the hangman at Tyburn. He was one of the most active enemies of the king, and signed the death-warrant.

E. C. C.—It is etiquette to raise the hat when you meet a lady in the street whom you know. The hat is never touched except when an inferior salutes his superior—as a private his officer, or a servant his employer. You say a lady took you to task for calling her name when you greeted her in the street as "Good-evening, Miss B." If you are well acquainted with the young lady, and passed close to her, your greeting was not improper. It would not be good form to have addressed her unless you were quite near. Your third question is whether a lady is not too exacting who requires her admirer to be the first to write after he has paid her a visit, she living fourteen miles from his own place of abode, and he having already contributed the last letter to the correspondence? Yes, "E. C. C." that girl is a little too despotic. A fourteen miles ride across the country these cold, windy days ought to be worth a very nice letter, even though you had not been "the last to write."

ELLA's parents urge her to marry a man she does not love and her heart impels her to a man that doesn't love her. "What shall I do to make him love me!" asks this girl. Ah, Ella, if we knew the love-compelling secret do you think we would be sitting here at an office desk? We would be riding the tropic seas in a steam yacht of our own or inhabiting a palace grand as the Kubla Khan's. There are thousands of poor mortals who would give us half their fortunes and more if we could tell them how to make the beloved ones love them in return. Perhaps they would cease to prize the coveted gift when they had it in possession. It is the way with all of us grown-up spoiled children. We cry for the toy we haven't got. Suppose you try to like the toy that fate and your parents seem anxious you should take, and do your best to believe that the grapes out of reach are very sour. If a man will not love you when you try in all modest ways to attract him he will certainly not care for you if you make unwomanly advances—throw yourself at him, as he will call it.

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